

POSTMODERNITY: IMPACT AND IMPLICATIONS

by

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Assumptions

I assume throughout that postmodernity is a real, contemporary, primarily Western cultural dynamic, that requires thorough consideration. I further assume that as an anthropocentric cultural dynamic, postmodernity requires a Christian response. I assume throughout, the authority, and validity of the Holy Bible, and the historic person of Jesus Christ as given in Scripture. I use the New King James Version of the Bible throughout, simply because I am most familiar with it. Portions of this project are a Christian apologetic (*i.e.*, defence). For this, I have no regrets, for “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile” (Rom. 1:16).

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Key Terms

Postmodern, postmodernity, postmodernism, deconstruction, post-colonialism, pluralism, apologetics, Neo-Paganism, Post-Christendom, progress.

Declaration

I declare that, *Postmodernity: Impact and Implications*, is my own work, and that all sources used, or quoted have been properly acknowledged.

Working Hypothesis

I believe postmodernity is a Western cultural dynamic that can, and should be better understood, because of the impact it has already had within Western culture and beyond, and because of its present and future implications for global Christianity.

Table of Contents

Introduction	6
Overview	10
<i>Chapter I</i>	
Historic Roots / Pre-Modernity	11
Modernity	15
Cultural Impact	28
Modernization vs. Westernization	33
Romanticism	35
Existentialism	40
Jean Paul-Sartre	44
The Mind of Sartre	47
<i>Chapter II</i>	
Postmodernity: The Essentials	51
Deconstruction	58
Postmodern Epistemology	66
Michel Foucault	72
Will ‘Po-Mod’ Endure?	83
<i>Chapter III</i>	
Postmodern and Postcolonial	86
<i>Chapter IV</i>	
Postmodern Pluralism	92
Population Dynamics and Pluralism	93
Absent Moral Foundations	96
Saved from what?	100
The Slippery Slope	104
<i>Chapter V</i>	
A Christian Response to Postmoderns?	110

An Apologetic Response?	115
Compromise vs. Contextualisation	123
<i>Chapter VI</i>	
Postmodernity and the Decline of Western Christianity	131
Historical Christendom	136
<i>Corpus Privatus</i> or <i>Publicas</i> ?	142
Territorial Christianity	144
Stuart Murray on Post-Christendom	148
Lack of Purpose	151
The Anglican Rift	155
<i>Chapter VII</i>	
Postmodern Spirituality	163
Postmodern Spiritual Hunger	171
Neo-Paganism	176
New Age	186
Postmodern Assault on Time	192
Conclusions	196
Bibliography of Published Sources	200
Bibliography of Electronic Sources	209

Postmodernity: Impact and Implications

Introduction

It is impossible to know to what extent the peoples of the earth are now inter-connected, as Globalisation has become a present reality for most of earth's inhabitants, largely thanks to the dawn of the 'jet' and 'computer' ages. Our economies are more entwined than at any time in history: good in some ways, bad in others. What happens in Japan, for example, can affect Canada and Bolivia as well. The rich Western nations are some of the greatest consumers of raw materials the world has ever seen; but other industrialized nations, especially Japan and China, are close competitors, and may soon surpass the Western nations. At the rate humanity is consuming the earth's natural resources and polluting the planet and its atmosphere, is it any wonder people question our collective future? Yet, 'progress' marches on.

Throughout history, human selfishness and arrogance have caused great conflict and incredible suffering. From mankind's earliest interactions with his neighbours, there have been arguments, battles and wars. Technological advancements that gave one man, family, or tribe an advantage, led to counter-advancements by his neighbours, leading in turn to other advances, and so forth. This tit-for-tat, create-and-retaliate mentality drove mankind to new levels of destructive capacity during the 20th Century. By the 1960's and the height of the Cold War, men were finally capable of destroying the entire planet -- literally in minutes -- thanks to thermo-nuclear weaponry.

Pandora's Box has been opened, and all mankind now lives with the daily, open secret that there is no return from whence we had come. For instance, while the Cold War is officially over, the US, Russia and various other nations, have thousands of nuclear weapons ready to launch at a moment's notice. Technological advances in military weaponry have now made it possible to kill massively *via* many means: biological, chemical, or nuclear weapons. Beyond intentional tools of destruction, humanity has also

killed massively in the name of good, for man is never wise enough to control what he creates, much less to see beyond the immediacy of what he does today. Humans continue to justify the slow, wholesale destruction of our planet in the name of progress, bringing us ever closer to the brink of extinction.

What drives this ongoing quest? Where is the innate ‘goodness’ of mankind? Why do we keep ‘modernising’ and ‘industrialising,’ all the while knowing we are killing ourselves and our posterity in the process? Why, if man is innately good, are there more wars, and more bloodshed today than ever before in human history? Are we not supposed to be getting better? If mankind is innately good, as the humanists still claim, where is the proof? When will mankind ‘turn things around,’ and *via* ‘progress,’ make life better for all, as always promised? The writer of the book of James answers all these questions:

Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”? But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (Jam. 4:1-6).

The Bible is honest enough to tell us that man is corrupt from birth (*cf.*, Psa. 51:5). Humanity is not innately good, but evil -- driven by selfishness, and rebellion (*cf.*, Psa. 52; 140). “Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead” (Ecc. 9:3b). Humans sometimes do good things, but only because of the outpouring of God’s grace upon all flesh (Mat. 5:45b, c). Humanity does not like this truth, for in it, God is exalted, not man. God is patient and merciful with all flesh, but not forever. “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any

should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2Pe. 3:9).

What has this to do with postmodernity? Simply stated, postmodernity is the next progression of man’s frustration with himself. Modernity -- the Enlightenment project -- remains the great driving force of our world, a force I earnestly doubt will cease until either mankind has destroyed itself or Christ returns to save us from ourselves. As we will discuss herein, since the dawn of the Enlightenment, there have been other waves of discontent with modernity -- post or ultra modernity is simply the latest. As postmodernity passes, still another anti-modernist reaction will likely arise in the future.

The postmodern story is another chapter in the wide and diverse history of humanity. Postmodernity is an expression of mankind’s frustration with himself -- with his own inabilities and shortcomings. Man cannot overcome his own failings, nor can he dominate the natural world, try as he does. Men will not cease in their rebellion against God, wanting to be ‘gods’ instead. Men want to control, rule and dominate, but all these efforts will inevitably fail, just as the Tower of Babel failed (Gen. 11:1-9).

It is historically too early to accurately calculate the impact of postmodernity. Postmodernity consumes the thoughts of some, while others virtually ignore it. A growing number of scientists now say it matters little, for it was a construct doomed from the start, and has had no affect on their work. Still others attempt to be more patient and balanced on the matter, an approach I have attempted to embrace.

What is increasingly clear, however, is that postmodernity *has* affected Western culture, and *is* affecting many non-Western cultures as well. Samuel Escobar, a native Peruvian who teaches at a US seminary, believes with others, that postmodernity is profoundly affecting people far beyond Western borders. “I compare notes with my students from Myanmar, Ghana or India, and something similar is happening there. We need to understand these new cultural trends not only in the West but also globally” (2003:71).

Postmodernity is complex, confusing, and often incredibly difficult to grasp. One cannot exclusively study postmodernity, because it is so inter-twined in history, and with other cultural dynamics affecting the West and far beyond. Postmodernity is intentionally fragmentary and anti-foundationalist. There is a frequent overlap of issues, all jumbled

together in an eclectic, rather *de facto* pluralistic muddle about everything.

Postmodernity, post-colonialism, pluralism and post-Christendom -- the main topics considered in this project -- are distinct from each other, yet especially in Western cultures so inter-twined they must all be considered. Postmodernity introduces a fresh cultural wave of anthropocentrism, a resurgent human arrogance rooted in subjectivism and relativism. Perhaps greater and longer lasting than postmodernity itself, however, are the powerful pluralistic influences in the West, a dynamic also considered herein.

There is a plethora of books, articles and websites available today that examine the subject. These works run the gamut from the cursory, to the profound and erudite. By now I have now read many books and articles on the subject, and have interacted with dozens of people in person and *via* electronic technologies, to gain greater understanding of this oft-confusing subject -- and finally feel I have attained a modicum of understanding about it. Still, I would not call myself 'expert,' for the subject is so convoluted. The dynamic nature of contemporary Western culture means that many of my sources came from the Internet, rather than traditionally published sources: such is the nature of postmodern research. While I read literally hundreds of On-line 'blogs,' and other such materials, I have prudently tried to use only credible sources.

Among the published works are: Millard J. Erickson's, *Truth or Consequences: The Promise & Perils of Postmodernism* (2001), which focuses on the postmodern battle for truth; Gene E. Veith's *Postmodern Times* (1994), which is among the best overall books on the subject I have read; and Stuart Murray's, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World* (2004), an excellent work that traces the disestablishment of Christianity in the West.

Concerning postmodernity, some authors focus on the epistemological, others on the philosophical. My own interests are inclined toward the cultural and religious, which broadly describes the religio-cultural tenor of this project. It seems a bit odd for an American to be doing doctoral research on a Western cultural phenomenon, with a traditionally black South African public university. Perhaps this says something about our new global reality. Yet, the African interest in new religious movements makes this relationship appropriate.

Overview

Chapter I concerns the historical roots and development of postmodernity. Without this discussion, there is no way to truly understand what postmodernity is. Because postmodernity is a violent reaction against modernity, unless one understands modernity, there is no understanding postmodernity. Chapter II concerns postmodernity proper, and considers basic components, like Deconstruction. Chapter III considers the relationship between post-colonialism and postmodernity. Section IV considers postmodern pluralism, a topic with particular relevance for all Christians around the globe. Chapter V is a Christian response to postmodernity, including among other things, a discussion *vis-à-vis* the difference between contextualisation and compromise. Chapter VI is a discussion focused on post-Christendom and its [critical] relationship to postmodernity. Chapter VII concludes the project by considering postmodern spirituality, which is a fascinating dimension of this cultural dynamic.

The primary question asked in this project, is: “What is postmodernity, its impact and implications?” I will ask and attempt to answer this, and many more questions throughout. This project includes consideration of postmodernity from many different perspectives. It is my sincere hope that it adds to contemporary understanding of the subject. In the end, I can only hope, by God’s grace, that this project will bless others, even as it has helped me to grow. I truly want this project to be relevant to the non-Western reader, especially those who have not yet experienced the often-empty hopes and promises of modernity.

Postmodernity: Impact and Implications

Chapter I

Historic Roots of Postmodernity

Premodernity

Postmodernity is best and perhaps only understood, when placed in historical context. It is, therefore, necessary that this consideration of postmodernity begin by establishing the larger historical context, since there is no way to [correctly] understand what the postmodern cultural wave is, unless one understands what it is not. Postmodernity is in essence -- anti-modernity.

Historical periodisation is an always-challenging task, especially at transitional points. For our purposes, we will assume the period demarcations supplied by the confluence of several [Western] encyclopaedic sources, which are generally these: the prehistoric period, history prior to 3500 BC; the ancient and classical periods, 3500 BC-500 AD; the postclassical period, 500–1500; the early modern Period, 1500–1800; the Modern Period, 1789–1914; the world war and interwar period, 1914-1945; and the contemporary period after 1945, with the end of World War II. Premodernity is now generally considered the Western cultural period which began around 500 AD and lasted to around 1400 AD, when moveable type and the printing press were invented.

Also helpful are the historical demarcations provided by pre-eminent historian Will Durant, who identifies the early Renaissance period as 1300-1576, which is particularly focused on the Italian Renaissance. The French and English Renaissance periods are generally 1643-1715, which marks the substantive European cultural transition from superstition to scholarship, as Durant places it (Durant, 1963:481f). He also identifies the Age of Reason as 1558-1648, and the Enlightenment as beginning with the Frenchman Rousseau in 1712, to about 1789 with the climax of the French Revolution. There are

certainly different views about this, but these will serve our purposes.

The premodern worldview was one in which truth; authority and one's basic worldview were derived from metaphysical sources. Spiritual intermediaries like Christian clerics and a variety of pagan shamans, guided people in such matters. Christian clerics held considerable social sway, especially in [European] urban areas; though it seems animistic beliefs were more popular among rural populations. Life was generally seen as unchanging and the social order was strictly enforced. People had little ability to make sense of the natural world around them, so superstition (*i.e.*, animism) was the norm. Even among Christians, the 'blending' of animistic beliefs with Christianity was common.

Western civilizations made a gradual transition into the modern period after about 1400 AD. What made the modern period remarkably different from the premodern period were the new mental and physical tools that enabled people to understand the natural world as never before. The 'real' world was increasingly perceived as something that could be known through empirical observation and rational thought (*i.e.*, science). No longer were people -- even the best educated -- helpless to explain their world without resorting to superstition and myth. For example, outbreaks of killer diseases (*e.g.*, smallpox) killed many because people did not yet have the mental and physical tools to understand the microscopic realm in order to combat these dreadful diseases.

The ancient Greeks were animists, but some among them wondered if there was not a more rational -- or, less superstitious -- way to think and live. These innovative Greeks helped to establish the physical - metaphysical duality about which contemporary peoples still wrestle. Socrates, for example, was forced to drink the hemlock (*i.e.*, a form of public execution) because of his 'atheism' -- a man who would not embrace the mythological worldview of his culture. From Socrates, Plato went on to develop classical idealism, "the view that the particulars of this world owe their form to transcendent ideals in the mind of God" (Veith, 1994:30). Aristotle followed Plato, studying nature in a way that would later inspire the empirical sciences. "Aristotle's analytical method -- with his distinction between means and ends, his relation of form to purpose, and his discovery of absolute principles that underlie every sphere of life -- pushed human reason to dizzying

heights” (Veith, 1994:30).

For all these contributions, Greek society long remained a mix of rationalism and animism. The Greek worldview tended to diminish sin, human responsibility and individual worth, notions variously changed through biblical influence. Greek society was generally morally decadent, one that “institutionalized infanticide, slavery, war, oppression, prostitution, and homosexuality” (Veith, 1994:30). Greek society, for example, did not just tolerate homosexuality, but promoted it. As a warring society, Greeks believed that soldiers interpersonally connected *via* homosexual relationships would fight harder to defend their lovers. “Even Plato believed that women were inferior, and that the highest love would be expressed between men” (Veith, 1994:31).

For the ancients, as with contemporary mankind, human rational thought alone could not provide the model for morality given by the Bible, for no higher moral order could come from mere men. The higher moral and ethical order had to come from a transcendent source, that being *Yahweh*, the God of the Bible, and through His chosen people who were to model those higher standards before the nations. The Greek gods -- fictive constructs of their animistic culture -- were little more than projections of human vices, like non-Yahwehistic cultures before them (*cf.*, Egyptian, Babylonian).

Judeo-Christian morals made a significant impact on the ancient world. The Greeks began to learn, even indirectly from both Jews and Christians, that what they lacked was transcendent, divine revelational wisdom and moral guidance (*cf.*, Act. 17). Homosexuality, infanticide and other pagan vices were seen in a different light and social mores and laws eventually changed. The Judeo-Christian influence also changed the way men considered women, gradually lifting their existence above human chattel. This eventually produced the biblically influenced Greco-Roman culture that dominated the Occident until the early 5th Century AD, after which the Roman and Eastern churches played a more direct social role.

In truth, no pre-biblical, or un-biblical, society has ever able to live above itself. Humanity is like fish in a bowl, unable to achieve any higher ordered wisdom without ‘outside’ help. The fish only knows its limited aquarium world, and the murky fragments it perceives beyond it. An old Chinese proverb says: “If you want to know what water is,

don't ask the fish.” Without God's infusion of transcendent, or outside, wisdom, humanity is unable to know a better way of thinking and living. “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Pro. 16:25). Only this divine infusion can pull mankind up out of the mire of his narrow existence (*cf.*, Psa. 69:1f; Isa. 57:20-21; 2Pe. 2:22).

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper. The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish (Psa. 1:1-6).

The Greeks did much to influence Occidental (or Western) thinking, though as Newbigin points out, until Christianity changed the European worldview, theirs was essentially Asian and especially similar to the Indian (Newbigin, 1996:65). For over a thousand years “the peoples of Europe were shaped into a distinct society by the fact that this story (*i.e.*, Christianity) was the framework in which they found meaning for their lives. It was this story, mediated through the worship of the church -- its art, architecture, music, drama, and popular festival -- that shaped a culture distinct from the great cultures of the rest of Asia” (*ibid.* 68). Newbigin sees the Enlightenment as cultural regression, “a return to the earlier paradigm” (*ibid.* 68). The Enlightenment worldview intentionally dislodged the Bible as the moral driving force of European culture, and Christianity has been marginalized in Europe since, where Paganism is now experiencing a renaissance.

For over a thousand years, a mix of Greco-Roman philosophies, animism, and Christianity dominated the Occident. St. Thomas Aquinas, a foundational Christian theologian, was among those who wrestled deeply with the interplay between the faith and human reasoning. Though he “accorded primacy to revelation, he recognized an

autonomy proper to human reason and clearly delineated the spheres of faith and reason, maintaining the importance of philosophy and the sciences even for theology” (Cross, 1997:1615). At times, the Bible was subordinated to human reasoning, at other times the reverse. All the while, animistic beliefs remained deeply imbedded in the worldview of many people. A strong medieval state-church made for a Christianized culture, but produced a Christian veneer that could not root out animistic beliefs and practices across the Occident.

Modernity

People periodically wonder about their reason for being, or *raison d'être*, and whether their life is as good as it could, or should be. There are times when traditions and conventions no longer satisfy, so people look elsewhere for answers. The prevailing worldview of the pre-modern period satisfied many, but hardly all, and the unsettled among them began to search for answers beyond the accepted norms of the day. Scholars now more widely agree that periods of cultural and intellectual renaissance do occur periodically, especially driven by discontent, and/or troubles of some kind. Historians now usually differentiate several renaissance periods in Europe, such as the 12th Century Renaissance, or the Carolingian Renaissance.

The pre-modern period was a time across Europe when religious dogmatism and fanaticism were common. “Prior to the enlightenment life in all its stratifications and ramifications was pervaded with religion” (Bosch, 2000:267). Christianity and the various animistic beliefs of pre-Christian Europe were still quite enmeshed. At times, people were imprisoned for not attending church. All publications were thoroughly scrutinized and anything not in accord with the teachings of the church were subject to censorship and/or destruction (Durant, 1961:580). Creating and publishing unauthorized versions of the Bible (*e.g.*, Wycliffe), could mean death.

The divine right of kings was widely assumed; slavery in various forms common, and tyranny and intolerance by rulers was normative. “One of the chief issues confronting the age was the problem of authority, and it affected the church at every turn” (Cragg, 1960:11). State governments increasingly flexed their greater socio-political influence over the church, at times relegating religion to the status of a department of state. European rulers both protected and managed the church, most often for the attainment of personal, or state ends. “The long-term effect was to diminish the cultural and political power of the church” (Guder, 2000:6). The push toward national churches further tested the central authority of the Roman Church.

Though the church was still the principal agent of social welfare, it could no longer meet the demands which were laid upon it.. It was everywhere powerless to remedy the basic needs of the peasants when the dislocations of capitalist agriculture overwhelmed (Cragg, 1960:11).

Churches routinely taught church traditions instead of the Bible, and clerical corruption was widespread, though hardly all encompassing as is sometimes reported. “Within the inner circle of the church, ill-conceived paganism was raising its head and in practice if not in word, the Christian faith was denied by many of its official representatives” (Latourette, 1975:2:641). Church and state leaders of the period became “persuaded that the first concern of imperial authority was the protection of religion and so, with terrible regularity, issued many penal edicts against heretics” (Water, 2001:599). The Inquisition eventually became the primary means of silencing critics, but well before this, secular and sacred leadership went to whatever lengths deemed prudent to protect both state and church.

Everywhere and always in the past men believed that nothing disturbed the commonwealth and public peace so much as religious dissensions and conflicts, and that, on the other hand, a uniform public faith was the surest guarantee for the States stability and prosperity. The more thoroughly religion had become part of the national life, and the stronger the general conviction of its

inviolability and Divine origin, the more disposed would men be to consider every attack on it as an intolerable crime against the Deity and a highly criminal menace to the public peace (Water, 2001:614).

Theologians and jurists alike began to compare heresy to treason, considering heretics, “robbers of the soul.” Regrettably, this same mentality carried over into early Protestantism, which perpetrated the same kinds of maltreatment (*cf.*, Calvin’s Geneva). Yet, without the Protestant Reformation and the subsequent reforms endorsed by the Council of Trent (1545-1563), the Roman Catholic Church “might have continued its degeneration from Christianity into paganism until your popes would have been enthroned over an agnostic and Epicurean world” (Durant, 1985:940).

Church dogma and other long-standing biblical and cultural assumptions were increasingly questioned. “The authority of the church was challenged in many spheres, but no where so seriously as in the intellectual realm” (Cragg, 1960:12). The notion that the human mind at birth was a ‘blank slate,’ was increasingly accepted, in deference to the traditional biblical view that all are born sin-corrupted (*cf.*, Psa. 51:5a). It also began to be assumed that an ethical [secular] culture was a possible and adequate substitute for the Christian faith. People gradually pushed for greater freedom from church dogma and the personal, social restrictions the church imposed upon them.

The Christendom of the day believed a strong, centralized church, and strong-handed governments were necessary to maintain regional integrity and security, notions driven by pragmatic concerns. Indeed, Muslim aggressions into Eastern and Southern Europe had already significantly altered the old Roman Empire, as had the continued influx of Barbarians from the North. Adding to regional tensions was the reality -- even after the Reformation -- of massive Christian conversions to Islam, especially in the Balkans region. The rise of the Ottoman Turks with attendant religio-political pressures, seemed to hasten these defections to Islam, but many former Christians willingly converted (Latourette, 1975:2:901). Among the motivations for these defections, especially after the Reformation, was frequent fighting between Catholic and Protestant groups, as well as battles within their own ranks.

Alister E. McGrath makes the point that the Medieval Roman Church was widely diverse in its doctrines and especially lacked a unified doctrine concerning justification -- at least something more current than outdated statements from the Council of Carthage, c.418 AD (McGrath, 1993:33, 91). Papal reluctance to define the church's stand on justification led to mass doctrinal confusion, and to Martin Luther's eventual challenges, which led eventually to the Protestant Reformation. This widespread hunger for 'truth' drove many to rediscover the original heart and substance of the ancient writings, especially removed from the scholarly clutter that had accumulated around these ancient texts over the years. "The 'filter' of medieval commentaries -- whether on legal texts or on the Bible -- is abandoned, in order to engage directly with the original texts. Applied to the Christian church, the slogan *ad fontes* meant a direct return to the title-deeds of Christianity -- the patristic writers and, supremely, the Bible" (McGrath, 1993:46). For the humanists, this specifically meant a fresh consideration of the Greco-Roman texts.

The rediscovery of these ancient texts produced a true cultural reawakening in Europe. There was an explosion of learning, along with new techniques in art, poetry and architecture, giving tangible expression to the period. The changes helped to bring Europe out from its long, dark cultural 'backwater' period, and gave rise to new commercial ventures and exploration. "Renaissance humanism rediscovered and reasserted the Greeks; the Reformation rediscovered and reasserted the Bible. Both classicism and Biblicism came back to life in a purified form" (Veith, 1994:31). In fact, it was widely hoped that greater understanding of the Word of God, along with the world of God, would bring about a true flourishing of humanity.

The Reformation in large part revived Augustinianism, and produced Protestant commitments to *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, *sola scriptura*, and *solus deo gloria*. As David Bosch has suggested (Bosch, 2000:267f), the biblical worldview made Europe unique among the nations, and paved the way for the Age of Reason. Where the Renaissance encouraged widespread trust in man's ability to dominate his life and environment, the "Reformation joined in the process leading toward modern secularization by questioning the authority and certainty of medieval Christian culture. Since the Reformation, the place and power of the institutional church's with their societies have gradually

diminished” (Bosch, 2000:6). The early humanism was quite different from the humanism we are familiar with today, as Alister McGrath notes:

When the word ‘humanism’ is used by a twentieth-century writer, we are usually meant to understand an anti-religious philosophy which affirms the dignity of humanity without any reference to God. ‘Humanism’ has acquired very strongly secularist -- perhaps even atheist -- overtones. But in the sixteenth century, the word ‘humanist’ had a quite different meaning... Humanists of the fourteenth, fifteenth or sixteenth centuries were remarkably religious, if anything concerned with the renewal rather than the abolition of the Christian church (McGrath, 1993:40).

Certainly, not all that happened in Europe during this period was good or positive. A number of small wars were waged, religious and political persecution was all too frequent, and the Borgia Popes became infamous. The advent and growth of the new ‘enlightened’ worldview also produced pockets of societal regression to the former Asian [Oriental] worldview (Newbigin, 1996:68). This shift was gradual, yet in some places gained support rapidly, as the innate human desire for individual freedom accorded well with the humanist worldview. In time, even the supernatural beliefs of Christianity were discounted as irrational foolishness, and likened to the myths and superstitions of pagans. “In due course the sufficiency of reason was confidently affirmed, and the whole content of Biblical theology was relegated to a marginal status of comparative insignificance” (Cragg, 1960:13).

From the Renaissance (15th Century) and Reformation (16th Century), to the Enlightenment (18th Century) spans about four hundred years, and is usually considered the cradle of modern thought. While it is certain that contemporary Catholicism is a product of the middle ages, “Protestant theology took its form from the Reformation in the sixteenth century, and the modern secular outlook from the rational, enlightened philosophies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries” (Brown, 1968:37). The Enlightenment effectively advanced what had begun during the earlier Renaissance period, advocating even more aggressively, intellectual rationality as a means to

knowledge, aesthetics, and ethics.

Leaders of various movements during the period considered themselves courageous and elite, taking the world into a new era of progress, free from the long centuries of doubtful traditions, superstitious irrationality, and political and religious tyranny. Prominent Enlightenment thinkers, like Voltaire, questioned and attacked existing social institutions, especially church - state relations. These ideological changes laid the foundation for sweeping changes across the Occident. Significant thinkers of the period were Rene Descartes, Benedictus de Spinoza, Isaac Newton, and John Locke, to name a few. In his famous 1784 essay, *What Is Enlightenment?*, Immanuel Kant said:

Enlightenment is man's leaving his self-caused immaturity. Immaturity is the incapacity to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. Such immaturity is self-caused if its cause is not lack of intelligence, but by lack of determination and courage to use one's intelligence without being guided by another. The motto of enlightenment is therefore: *Sapere aude!* Have courage to use your own intelligence! (Kant, 1874).

The Enlightenment extolled the rational and orderly, the organization of knowledge and government, and eventually gave birth to Socialism and Capitalism. Geometric order, rigor and reductionism were seen as virtues of the Enlightenment. This mechanically precise, or Newtonian universe, had little room for the transcendent, or supernatural, exalting man as master of his realm. Descartes believed only doubt "would purge the human mind of all opinions held merely on trust and open it to knowledge firmly grounded in reason" (Bosch, 2000:349).

The precision and inflexibility of the mechanical paradigm led to excessive specialization, even in the church, and for many, Deism became popular as a pseudo-Christian alternative. "To Voltaire and those who shared his views, the Enlightenment offered emancipation from 'prone submission to the heavenly will'" (Cragg, 1960:12). The notion of liberty -- including liberty from the church -- grew in popularity as well. Scientists found less and less place for God in their constructs. Previously, man owed his existence to God, but now man was growing ever stronger and wiser, and did need any

‘god’ to keep and to save him.

Freud declared religions to be nothing but an illusion. Marx saw it as something evil, the ‘opiate of the people.’ Emile Durkheim suggested that every religious community was, really, only worshipping itself (Bosch, 2000:269).

The Enlightenment also extolled the notions of natural or self-apparent freedoms like individual liberty, personal property, and justice for all -- revolutionary concepts following both feudal and monarchical European social patterns. Enlightenment ideals became the heart of newly formed governments and figured prominently in critical documents drafted during the period, among them: the American Declaration of Independence, the American Constitution of 1787, and the Polish Constitution of May 3, 1791. Many established governments were reordered -- sometimes through extreme violence -- according to Enlightenment ideals (*e.g.*, France). Political unrest and violent change became quite common, resulting in the American (1776), French (1787-1799), Belgian (1792), Italian (1796), Swiss (1798), European (1848), and Russian (1917) Revolutions, as well as two world wars during the 20th Century, that destroyed much of Central and Western Europe, and far beyond. Concerning these so-called, self-evident truths, Newbiggin comments:

It would seem that the splendid ideals of the Enlightenment -- freedom, justice, human rights -- are not ‘self-evident truth,’ as the eighteenth century supposed. They seemed self-evident to a society that had been shaped for more than a thousand years by the biblical account of the human story. When that story fades from corporate memory and is replaced by another story -- for example, the story of the struggle for survival in a world whose fundamental law is violence -- they cease to be ‘self-evident.’ Human reason and conscience, it would seem, do not operate in a vacuum. Their claim to autonomy is unsustainable. They are shaped by factors that are in operation prior to the thinking and experience of the individual. They are shaped most fundamentally by the story that a society

tells about itself, the story that shapes the way every individual reason and conscience works (Newbigin, 1996:74).

Periodic, critical, self-examination is beneficial for people and institutions of all ages. Yet, even with this need, criticism is seldom welcome, and change is often fiercely resisted. As Newbigin asserts, modernity's protest against Christendom's overzealous oppression of human freedoms was legitimate at the time (Newbigin, 1996:64). Those brave souls who dare to challenge the powers of their day -- in any age -- sometimes meet staunch resistance, even sometimes paying with their lives. Some of the cultural and ideological battles waged during the modern period remain pertinent in our day. Consider, for example, the ongoing controversy surrounding one of the greatest scientists ever, a story that so exemplifies the often-tense relationship between modernity, or science, and Christianity.

The great Christian Scientist, Galileo Galilei (15 February 1564 - 8 January 1642), was a man with revolutionary ideas. His differences with the conventional thinkers of his time and with the Roman Catholic Church are most interesting, and relevant yet today. The drama was not a battle between science and religion -- as has been and still is so often reported -- but rather a difference of opinions concerning Copernican and Aristotelian (or Ptolemaic) based science, and Scriptural supports of these constructs. To be sure, popularized accounts of the controversy are frequently full of historical inaccuracies and bias.

The story centres on Aristotle's belief that the cosmos was finite and spherical, with the earth at its centre -- a very understandable assumption for people without telescopes. This geocentric theory was endorsed by Aristotle and given mathematical plausibility by Ptolemy. It remained the prevailing model until Nicholas Copernicus, the churchman who first advanced the heliocentric concept. Common to the culture of Medieval Europe, the sciences were passed through the filter of Scripture to see if they accorded with the Bible. Such was the case here, as passages like Psalm 93:1d and 104:5 were cited to biblically affirm the Aristotelian notion of a geocentric cosmos. One of the reasons the Roman Church battled 'heresies' so vigorously, was because animistic beliefs and practices (*i.e.*, Paganism) were still rampant across Europe. Historian Durant says:

Occultism flourished among the Britons under Elizabeth and the early Stuarts. In 1597 King James VI published an authoritative *Demonologie*, which is one of the horrors of literature. He ascribed to witches the power to haunt houses, to make men and women love or hate, to transfer disease from one person to another, to kill by roasting a wax effigy, and to raise devastating storms; and he advocated the death penalty for all witches and magicians, and even for their customers. When a tempest nearly wrecked him on his return from Denmark with his bride, he caused four suspects to be tortured into confessing that they had plotted to destroy him by magic means; and one of them, John Fain, after the most barbarous torments, was burned to death (1590)..... In this matter the Kirk agreed with the King, and lay magistrates lenient to witches were threatened with excommunication. Between 1560 and 1600 some eight thousand women were burned as witches in a Scotland having hardly a million souls (Durant, 1961:162).

The great variety of animistic practices were never fully vanquished from the continent as is so often claimed, a critical truth that still concerns us today, and is more fully developed later. Even the fierceness of the Inquisition could not remove these pre-Christian beliefs and practices. Christianized culture -- or Christendom -- became a cultural veneer that merely drove animistic beliefs below the surface, as it were. Will Durant -- not always kind to Christianity -- comments:

Religions are born and may die, but superstition is immortal. Only the fortunate can take life without mythology. Most of us suffer in body and soul, and nature's subtlest anodyne is a dose of the supernatural. Even Kepler and Newton mingled their science with mythology: Kepler believed in witchcraft, and Newton wrote less on science than on the Apocalypse (Durant, 1961:575).

The historical record discloses that Copernicus advanced the heliocentric theory first, but did not have Galileo's boldness, fearing as much the mockery of fellow academics as

the wrath of the church. What both men suggested was revolutionary and would have a profound impact on the world. Galileo's broad Renaissance educational background -- though he never completed his university degree -- helped him to construct the telescope. With it, Galileo came to realize, as Copernicus had earlier even without the aid of a telescope, that the cosmos was heliocentric, not geocentric. Responses to Galileo's assertions ranged from enthusiastic, to hostile. It is important to remember in historical context, that this was the post-Reformation Roman Catholic Church, which had recently been shaken to its foundations by the Protestants. To be sure, it was an organization wary of additional criticisms. Historian Giorgio de Santillana, who was not fond of the Roman Catholic Church, writes:

We must, if anything, admire the cautiousness and legal scruples of the Roman authorities in a period when thousands of 'witches' and other religious deviants were subjected to juridical murder in northern Europe and New England. The Holy Tribunal of Cardinals condemned Galileo, stating that the "proposition that the sun is the centre of the world and does not move from its place is absurd and false philosophically and formally heretical, because it is expressly contrary to the Holy Scripture. The proposition that the earth is not the centre of the world and immovable, but that it moves, and also with a diurnal motion, is equally absurd and false philosophically, and theologically considered, at least erroneous in faith" (Rohr, 1988:44).

One highlight of this drama focuses on a letter Galileo wrote to Madame Christina of Lorraine, the Grand Duchess of Tuscany in 1615 entitled, *Concerning the Use of Biblical Quotations in Matters of Science*, which outlined his views. The church tribunal eventually used this letter against him in his first trial in 1616, claiming his science contradicted Scripture -- again, the heart of the controversy. The tribunal consequently directed Galileo to denounce Copernicanism and further, to abstain altogether from teaching, discussing, or defending his views. The story might have ended here, had not Galileo been such a stalwart personality.

He was a passionate, powerful character who could dominate any room or discussion. His talent and wit won a variety of illustrious friends in university, court and church circles At the same time his biting sarcasm against those whose arguments were vulnerable to his scientific discoveries made him some formidable enemies. Galileo thrived on debate... His professional life was spent not only in observing and calculating but also in arguing and convincing. His goal was to promote as well as develop a new scientific world view (Hummel, 1986:82).

Persisting in his challenges, to what was then biblically supported Aristotelian geocentrism; the Inquisition in 1632 cited Galileo. At age 70 Galileo withstood a second trial and censure, and was given lifetime house arrest by the Holy Office of the Inquisition, where he remained until his death in 1642. His living conditions were quite pleasant, however -- contrary to the way some paint the story, suggesting that Galileo was treated poorly, like so many others condemned by the Inquisition (*cf.*, Durant, 1961:611).

As his Protestant biographer, von Gebler, tells us, “One glance at the truest historical source for the famous trial, would convince any one that Galileo spent altogether twenty-two days in the buildings of the Holy Office (*i.e.* the Inquisition), and even then not in a prison cell with barred windows, but in the handsome and commodious apartment of an official of the Inquisition.” For the rest, he was allowed to use as his places of confinement the houses of friends, always comfortable and usually luxurious. It is wholly untrue that he was -- as is constantly stated -- either tortured or blinded by his persecutors -- though in 1637, five years before his death, he became totally blind -- or that he was refused burial in consecrated ground. On the contrary, although the pope (Urban VIII) did not allow a monument to be erected over his tomb, he sent his special blessing to the dying man, who was interred not only in consecrated ground, but within the church of Santa Croce at Florence

(Gerard, 2003).

It is true that to some church officials of the time, Galileo was thought a greater threat to the Catholic Church than Luther, or Calvin, because Galileo challenged notions that were in a sense, even more fundamental. Yet, only some involved at the time were anti-Copernicans. In fact, the Copernican heliocentric theory was never condemned *ex cathedra*. As the Pontifical Commission later pointed out, the sentence of 1633 was not irreformable. Galileo's works were eventually removed from the Index and in 1822, at the behest of Pius VII, the Holy Office granted an *imprimatur* to the work of Canon Settele, in which Copernicanism was presented as a physical fact and no longer as an hypothesis. One must also keep in mind that the Roman Church, an organizational culture shaped by the Middle Ages, does not conduct its affairs at the same pace as a 21st Century corporate entity. It moves with a deliberate, methodical pace.

Pope John Paul II (1920-2005) revisited this matter, asking the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in 1979 to study the celebrated case. They reported to the Pope eleven years later, on October 31, 1992, acknowledging the 'errors' of the Cardinals who judged against Galileo centuries earlier (Ross, 1989:21). Contrary to popular and often very inaccurate accounts at the time, Pope John Paul II was not admitting defeat, or the errors of his predecessors. Rather, the matter had been officially 'closed' since at least 1741 when Benedict XIV and the Inquisition granted an *imprimatur* to the first edition of the *Complete Works of Galileo*. Following the guidelines of the Second Vatican Council, Pope John Paul II wished to make clear from this, that science has a legitimate freedom in its own sphere, and that this freedom was unduly violated by Church authorities of the time. He said further that the entire matter involved a "tragic mutual incomprehension" (Ross, 1989:21), where both sides were at fault that the conflict should never have happened, for in proper light, faith and science are never at odds.

The story has often been used as a bludgeon against Christianity and the Catholic Church. Interestingly, revisiting the matter in the early 1990's added fuel to contemporary controversies involving homosexuality, cloning, abortion, pornography, *etc.* As is so common in contemporary debates, the church is misrepresented as being at war with 'enlightened' thought and science. A fair-minded assessment of the historical

record reveals that the church of the middle ages did much to advance science. How frequent it is that accounts of the controversy neglect to mention that Nicholas Copernicus was a Catholic priest, or that Galileo was a committed Christian. Galileo, along with the tribunal judges, shared the conviction that science and Scripture could not stand in contradiction. In truth, it is more often secular humanists that have misrepresented the issues and attacked the church, than *visa versa*.

Lesslie Newbigin notes from Graf Reventlow's work, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World* (1985. Fortress Press), that humanist attacks on the Christian worldview began much earlier even than the Renaissance and the rise of modern science, "in the strong humanist tradition which we inherit from the classical Greek and Roman elements in our culture, and which surfaced powerfully in the Renaissance and played a part in the Reformation" (Newbigin, 1989:1). Reventlow said that while ordinary churchgoers remained rooted in their biblical worldview, humanist notions increasingly controlled intellectuals. Here really began the modern duality, or division, of natural truths *versus* biblical truths. "As the eighteenth century rolls on, we find that the really essential truths are available to us from the book of nature, from reason and conscience; the truths which we can only learn from the Bible are of minor importance, *adiaphora* about which we need not quarrel" (*ibid.* 2). The marginalization of the Bible continues with great force from this point, bringing ever-greater scrutiny and criticism brought to bear against it, and reducing it to a text "full of inconsistencies, absurdities, tall stories, and plain immorality" (*ibid.* 2).

Modernity's Cultural Impact

Returning to the UK from decades of missionary work in India, Bishop Lesslie Newbigin was uniquely able to identify the changed character of Western culture that had developed during his absence. He noted in particular the sharp ideological division between 'values' and 'facts.' That Christianity in the West has historically responded to modernist challenges in several ways. The first has been to divorce religion from science; sometimes expressed in Pietism, or in various forms of Christian mysticism, where feelings and experience are given primacy over rationalism. The second has been the privatization of religion, where Christians have legally and socially withdrawn from the public sphere. The third response has been the faith community's accommodationist embrace of secular society, which has led to de-sacralisation movements in various forms (*cf.*, Bosch, 2000:269f), and is considered by many one of the main reasons for the decline of the traditional 'main-line' denominations in our postmodern era.

Newbigin noted that Hindus, for example, do not have the ideological conflict between science and religion that Westerners do. Eastern religions "do not understand the world in terms of purpose" (Newbigin, 1986:39). Modern notions of purpose and [linear] time come from the Bible. However, they were later attributed to secular humanist notions rooted in inevitable progress, and various utopianisms. Newbigin said Eastern religions are quite content to maintain a dualistic world, maintaining a practical separation between the secular and religious. Eastern religions do not fight the modernist, or scientific, worldview, as Western Christianity so often does. Because Eastern religionists do not fight science, but seek instead to co-exist in a non-conflictual manner, Eastern religions are generally more accepted by modernists than are religions that compete with, and/or criticise the modernist agenda (*e.g.*, Christianity, Islam).

The concepts of 'progress' and 'production' are two major driving forces of modernity. "Production became the highest goal of being human, resulting in humans having to worship at the altar of the autonomy of technology" (Bosch, 2000:355). The Enlightenment promised that rationalistic man could eventually dominate his world,

eliminating poverty, hunger and suffering. Instead, modern progress has produced a world where technological advancements have in some ways benefited mankind, but have also threatened our very existence (pollution, *etc.*). Mankind benefits from mechanization, but has also become its slave, as in humanity's growing need for energy sources (*e.g.*, coal, oil). Production and progress simply have not delivered as promised, yet in many parts of the world the "gospel of modernity" continues to be preached and practiced.

The church has been deeply influenced by the Enlightenment project. "Even where it resisted the Enlightenment mentality it [the church] was profoundly influenced by it" (Bosch, 2000:269). Reason became profoundly important in theology, even as it still is in our day. Theology eventually became a science, and the queen of the sciences. The accommodation to rationalism has thoroughly shaped and re-shaped the church and theological studies ever since. The preoccupation with proper interpretation, precision hermeneutics, and 'pure doctrine' continues to dominate Christian thinking in the West and now beyond. Not a few, especially in our postmodern day, argue that the absolutes sought by modernist theologians go beyond the scope and purposes of God, who demands that His own live by faith, not by sight (2Co. 5:7).

Why is modernity so broadly embraced, even among [committed] Christians? Because modernity is rooted in a man-exalting, man-pleasing ideology that accords with humanity's sin-corrupted [base] nature, about which the Bible clearly informs us (*cf.*, Gen. 6:4-7; Jer. 16:12; Mat. 15:19; Rom. 8:19f). In this fallen condition (*cf.*, Gen. 3), man's inclination is always toward corruption and rebellion against God (*cf.*, Luther, Martin. *The Bondage of the Will*). Passages such as Genesis 11:1-9 and Isaiah 14, esp. vs.13-14, among so many others -- reveal man's penchant for exalting himself and rebelling against God. Thus, an innate and direct product of man's inherent sin-corruption is the desire to deny and rebel against God and to exalt self. "Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but followed the counsels and the dictates of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward" (Jer. 7:24). Modernity has produced a cultural climate in which, "the Christian faith is severely questioned, contemptuously repudiated, or studiously ignored. Revelation, which used to be the matrix and fountainhead of

human existence, now has to prove its claim to truth and validity” (Bosch, 2000:268).

For the radical humanist, faith in God becomes restrictive, repressive and irrational -- much like the zeal that drove the Deist Voltaire and others during the French Revolution to such insane ends. “I believe in God, said Voltaire, not the God of the mystics and the theologians, but the God of nature, the great geometrician, the architect of the universe, the prime mover, unalterable, transcendental, everlasting” (Voltaire, in Cragg, 1960:237). Bosch says the “dominant characteristic of the modern era is its radical anthropocentrism” (Bosch, 2000:268).

The dominance over and objectification of nature and the subjecting of the physical world to the human mind and will -- as championed by the Enlightenment -- had disastrous consequences. It resulted in a world that was ‘closed, essentially completed and unchanging ... simple and shallow, and fundamentally un-mysterious -- a rigidly programmed machine’ (Bosch, 2000:355).

Especially after the French Revolution, science became the religion of secular humanism. Like Voltaire, God was not yet removed completely, for the Deist ‘god’ remained a mainstay for years, and the ‘death of God’ movement would come much later. The notion of a mechanical and distant ‘god’ was deeply embedded in the minds of many during the period, even among those who called themselves Christian. Historical arguments continue today, wondering to what extent prominent figures, like George Washington, the first President of the United States, were either Christian, or Deist.

Secular comes from the Latin, *saeculum*, in English ‘generation,’ or ‘age,’ meaning that something belongs to this age, or realm, or world -- not to a transcendent, religious order. Secularism is directly related to naturalism, “which holds that this world of matter and energy is all that exists” (Baker, in Moreau, 2000:865).

Secularism encourages the socio-cultural process of secularization, in which religious beliefs, values, and institutions are increasingly marginalized and lose their plausibility and power. Secularization may result in the elimination of religion entirely, as in atheistic and agnostic societies. Or it

may simply transform the nature and place of religion within society, resulting in 'this worldly' secularized form of religion. Secularization is often linked to modernization, so that as societies become increasingly modernized they also tend to become secularized (Baker, in Moreau, 2000:865).

Secularism is the proactive marginalisation, and/or removal of the religious from society, and has been a key component of modernity from the beginning. Secularism's ability to separate religion and politics has proven less effective than its ability to deal with religious diversity, especially under conditions of unequal power. In the idealistic, truly homogenous society, the coercive powers of the state are equitably applied. In the real world, so to speak, there are competing interests for the favours of the state. Those with the most power and/or money are often the ones who control the direction society and government take. This is no less true where religious interests are concerned. At times, the [secular] state is able to stay distanced and objective enough so as not to be the instrument of the majority religion. At other times, the state becomes the puppet of the majority religion -- many examples could be cited regarding this. In many so-called secular nations, religionists have learned how to be persuasive and effective in the political arena, and religious groups often do control great wealth and power, which enables them to be a political force.

The Secularization Thesis, which asserted that secularism would eventually replace religion around the globe, has probably affected Europe more than any other region on earth, but has nowhere worked as predicted. Turkey under its first President, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk (1881-1938), became one of the most secular Muslim states ever, but is still a nation very strongly attached to Islam. Societies are still driven by what [pragmatically] makes sense to them, and by what seems to be in their own best interest. The [modernist] secularization process did not remove religion, but *has* had an effect upon it. In fact, the threat of secularization has in more than a few instances worked against secularization, causing instead the resurgence of traditional religious beliefs, and driving nationalism and the predominant religion closer together.

Secular humanism in all its variations -- though not science *per se* -- is antithetical to

Christianity, and has a very real, anti-Christian agenda. Secular humanism seeks to marginalize metaphysical beliefs. It promotes naturalism, espousing the premise that humanity evolved it was not created by a Divine being. It goes beyond Voltaire's claim of a Deist God, claiming in totality that there is no higher power, intelligent designer, or first cause. Man is master of his realm and free to do as he pleases, which inevitably becomes -- as Darwin suggested -- a battle for survival of the fittest; to him who is strongest, go the spoils.

The Greek philosopher Protagoras said, "Man is the measure of all things," affirming an agenda as old as mankind. Secular humanism is fully persuaded that man can and must save himself, for if there is a 'god,' he has certainly not shown himself, at least not in a manner that has convinced the intellect of 'enlightened' mankind. Despite the errors of mankind's past, they claim, a bright future awaits us; if we will but use our potential to the greater good of all, for man is master of his domain.

Further down this path, not only is there no god -- man is 'god.' Rooted in Narcissism, or *hubris*, man's great arrogance supposes that he knows all and can accomplish all, just as at the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9). Man in his arrogance supposes that he needs no guidance, especially from some 'higher power.' It is the arrogance of modernity that so frustrates and enrages the postmodern. Still, like the modern, the postmodern will not turn to the God of the Bible, but instead to all manner of false 'gods,' including twisted forms of self-deity. "O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jer. 10:23).

Secularism represents a rival, anthropocentric religion, an absolutizing of what were previously regarded as penultimate concerns. All religions are relativized, the products of particular historical and socioeconomic contexts. They represent the ways in which various cultures have tried to answer ultimate questions and provide ethical norms and moral sanctions. Their value is judged on their ability to provide coping mechanisms, and not on their truth claims in regard to the nature of God and his relationship to the created order (Gibbs, in Moreau, 2000:865).

Contrary to Christian notions that the Bible *can* inform and guide our worldly existence, the secular humanist only acknowledges a reality known and established by human observation, experimentation, and [human] rational analysis (*i.e.*, naturalism). Where the boundaries of social behaviour are concerned, naturalists argue that moral boundaries are derived in like manner, as tested through experience. There is no need for holy books, and divine imperatives -- man can govern himself, and since 'God' is not scientifically testable, what rational, modern, scientific human would surrender his life and the greater order of humanity to such mythical and mystical foolishness. Consider, for example, this brief quotation from the Humanist Manifesto:

We find insufficient evidence for belief in the existence of a supernatural; it is either meaningless or irrelevant to the question of survival and fulfilment of the human race. As non theists, we begin with humans not God, nature not deity. Nature may indeed be broader and deeper than we now know; any new discoveries, however, will but enlarge our knowledge of the natural (Manifesto II, First premise).

Modernisation *versus* Westernisation

David R. Gress, senior fellow at the *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, and co-director of the *Center for Studies on America and the West*, cautions that we do not confuse Westernization, with modernization. In our increasingly globalized world, it is arguably more often modernity -- not Western culture *per se* -- that is being exported, embraced by and incorporated into other [primary] cultures. Modernist notions like capitalism, democracy, secularism and secularization, progress and science are ever more widely embraced around the globe.

To help make this distinction, consider for instance and by comparison, that while

Christianity is often considered a Western religion, it is much more, having come from Middle Eastern [Oriental] cultural origins, now rooted in a multiplicity of non-Western cultures (*e.g.*, African). While Christianity is often thought [historically] to be Western, the faith has always been an important presence in Oriental cultures *via* the Orthodox streams (*e.g.*, Russian, Syrian) of the faith. All Christians are not Westerners, nor are all Westerners Christians. This is quite confusing to Muslims, for example, who most often blur distinctions between national and religious convictions. For instance, to be Turkish is to be Muslim and so forth. For this very reason many around the world simply do not understand that in Western culture in particular, there is a real distinction between national and religious allegiance. Gress further suggests that:

Modernity dissolves all existing civilizations and creates a matrix for future civilizations that do not yet exist. It is not Westernization, but a universal change in the fundamental conditions of any and all civilizations. A fully modern world may have as many, or more, civilizations as did the premodern world because a civilization is not just a matter of democracy, science, and capitalism, but of ritual, manners, literature, pedagogy, family structure, and a particular way of coming to terms with what Christians call the four last things: death, judgment, heaven, and hell. Modernity will not change or remove the basic human condition, to which each culture provides its own distinct answers (Gress, 1997).

Just one example of this are the growing modernizing - counter modernizing tensions within the broader Islamic community. A counter modernizing movement like the one led by the Ayatollah Khomeini overthrew the pro-modernizing and pro-Western Iranian government in 1979. In fact, the situation in present-day Iran is a postcolonial reaction to Western neo-colonialism. The Ayatollah Khomeini consequently established a government re-established in traditional Islamic and Iranian culture. Yet, contemporary Iran, like other Islamic states, is a religio-cultural paradox, with one foot in nationalist-Muslim traditions and the other ever more firmly planted in modernity. Traditionalist Iranian leaders staunchly resist Westernization, yet are obviously working hard to

‘modernize’ the nation.

To be sure, confusing modernisation with Westernisation is easily done, as the two can be very difficult to differentiate. There are many examples of cultures that have deeply embraced modernity, while they have only marginally embraced Western culture. Among these examples are: Japan, China and a host of other Pacific-Rim nations. The ongoing, massive contemporary industrialization of China is certainly rooted in modernism, but China is hardly westernizing, leaving little doubt anymore that a culture can modernise, without Westernising.

To conclude, the failures of modernity are obvious to many -- yet modernity continues to prosper around the globe. Modernity has given mankind many good things, but has also unleashed unimaginable horrors and the potential for our own self-destruction. Modernity is simply not the grand solution to all mankind’s problems. However, since humanity will not turn from its rebellion against the God of the Bible, men will continue to embrace, however foolishly, the only agenda that seems sensible.

Romanticism

Against the growing tide of modernity, inevitably came a more human, feeling movement. Followed the Renaissance and Age of Reason, came the Romantic, counter-intuitive climate, which stressed the “role of mystery, imagination and feeling” (Brown, 1968:109). It is important to consider Romanticism, for here we see the early roots of postmodernism, but hardly the extremism. In fact, it is this historical pendulum swing in reaction to radical modernity that gives us our first insights about the anti-modern, and anti-rational extremism of the postmoderns, still many years in the future.

Romanticism arose during the 18th and 19th Centuries, and was so complex a movement that historians have never reached a consensus about it. The movement began in Germany and England in the late 18th Century, first sweeping Europe and then moving

throughout the Western Hemisphere. It had a profound affect on literature and art. Romantics were liberals, conservatives, rationalists, idealists, Catholics, atheists, revolutionaries and reactionaries. Their common theme was that the individual should have greater individual control of his world, and not be mindless creatures ever controlled by the ordered laws of the [Newtonian] universe. Modernity had replaced the cultural matrix of Christendom with a Newtonian focus that went far to eliminate imagination, sensitivity, feeling and spontaneity. The Romantics in reaction, believed mankind must be liberated from this new oppression.

The Romantics saw life as organic, not mechanical. “Rather than believing with the Deists that God is far away and detached, the Romantics believed that God is close at hand and intimately involved in the physical world” (Veith, 1994:35). Some even went so far in their efforts to bring God back, that they promoted pantheism. Romanticism promoted the biological, where people could be one with nature again, and “cultivated subjectivity, personal experience, irrationalism, and intense emotion” (Veith, 1994:36). Interestingly, this ‘organic’ revival has been renewed as a major component of postmodernity (*e.g.*, mother earth movements, ‘flower children’).

While many Romanticists were Christians, many others were not, finding secular ways to express their dissatisfaction with modernity. Romanticism played a critical role in the national awakening of many central European peoples who lacked their own national states. This was especially true for Poland, where the revival of ancient myths and customs by Romantic poets and painters helped the Poles to distinguish their heritage from the dominant states who so often oppressed them (*i.e.*, Germany, Russia, Austria). Romanticism helped the Poles and others like them, to recapture a sense of individuality and national identity, notions strongly inspired by the Frenchman, Rousseau.

Historian Colin Brown (c.1968) considers Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768-1834) among the most influential of the Romantics. He is often called the father of modern theology, and the man who rescued Protestant theology from a seemingly inevitable demise. Most Protestant’s, and the Roman Catholic Church as a whole, had resigned themselves to a culture in which the faith and modernity could not be reconciled. Schleiermacher believed otherwise, and elevated ‘feeling’ to the centre of religious

expression. This “first response (propagated or practiced by Schleiermacher, Pietism, and the evangelical awakenings) was to divorce religion from reason, locate it in human feeling and experience, and thus protect it from any possible attacks by the enlightenment’s tendency toward ‘objectifying consciousness’” (Bosch, 2000:269).

Schleiermacher was raised in a strong Christian family. He attended the Moravian seminary at Barby, and later studied at Halle -- at the time, the centre of radical thought in Germany -- then at Berlin, and read Kant and other modernists. He eventually became a member of “a brilliant circle of romantic writers and poets” (Brown, 1968:109). It was during this time that he published his celebrated, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (1799). Following the Napoleonic wars, he became one of the leading intellectuals in Germany and helped found the University of Berlin in 1810, the school at which he dominated the faculty of theology. He wrote much, and published works like the *Life of Jesus*. Many consider his systematic theology, *The Christian Faith* (1821, 1830), his most important work. Others consider him the most important theologian between John Calvin and Karl Barth (*cf.*, Livingston, 1997:93) -- a man who has influenced a great many, including Kierkegaard.

Schleiermacher explored and expanded traditionalist thinking. He sought to liberate theology from archaic forms, and worked to better understand the faith within the modernist climate. The rationalist challenges to theology at the time, and still even in our day, subjected all thought and history to critical scrutiny, a standard many from the faith community tried to attain. Yet, Schleiermacher questioned the overall value of this over-rationalistic approach to faith, emphasizing the practical over the theoretical, without necessarily sacrificing reason for faith (*cf.*, fideism). Where theology before modernity had been ‘from above,’ or of transcendent focus, after the arrival of modernity, and in Schleiermacher’s work as well, theology came ‘from below,’ having a God-imminent emphasis.

From Thomas Aquinas onwards were those who tried to merge the revealed, biblical faith, with natural theology -- the construct that focuses on God revealing himself through nature, in contrast to God-revealed through the prophets and their inspired writings. Kant held “that the two cancelled each other out, because natural theology was rotten at the

foundations, and was incapable of bearing the superstructure of Christian theology. Schleiermacher tried to steer a middle course between them. He developed what is sometimes called positive theology” (Brown, 1968:110). Brown adds that Schleiermacher’s approach leads to a form of Unitarianism (*ibid.* 113), and that with “Schleiermacher the dividing-line between Theism and Pantheism is a very fine one” (*ibid.* 114). Schleiermacher’s contributions are mild compared to postmodern thought.

Schleiermacher argued it was impossible to know God through reason, but *via* feelings, we can experience God. Christianity was more than a set of intellectual propositions to follow; it was also an inner experience, and “the feeling of absolute dependence” (Latourette, 1975:1122). For him, faith was not the experience of individuals, but rather the lived experience of the faith community, something the postmoderns would later agree with. He believed religions brought men into harmony with God -- but of all the religions, Christianity attained this end, best of all. He also believed that theology should be the expression of that same faith community. Schleiermacher believed there was knowing God intellectually and knowing God affectively, that religion was a mingling of the theoretical and practical:

Religion is for you at one time a way of thinking, a faith, a particular way of contemplating the world, and of combining what meets us in the world: at another, it is a way of acting, a peculiar desire and love, a special kind of conduct and character. Without this distinction of a theoretical and practical you could hardly think at all, and though both sides belong to religion, you are usually accustomed to give heed chiefly to only one at a time (Schleiermacher, 1958:27).

Schleiermacher saw theology as a second-level reflective activity. “He concerned himself with facts and phenomena -- with real, live religion, not simply with ‘God’ as a philosophical construct. He understood Christian theology to be (in his terms) ‘empirical,’ not ‘speculative’” (Gerrish, 1984:21). Schleiermacher’s theology also marries experience with Christology. For him, Christ is the one who supremely embodies ‘God-consciousness,’ and redeems humanity “by drawing men and women into the power

of his own awareness of God” (Gerrish, 1984:48).

Schleiermacher believed that God created the world ‘good,’ but that through mankind’s sin, humanity and creation were corrupted. Mankind is prone to sin because they are born into this predisposition. “Through sin men are alienated from God and therefore fear Him as judge, knowing that they deserve His wrath” (Latourette, 1975:1123). He further maintained that redemption was through Christ, who was a man, “but a man who was entirely unique in that he was dominated by the consciousness of God as no man had been before him and no man has since been” (*ibid.* 1123). His views were essentially those of historic Christianity, but his starting place was different than most, for he “began, not with the Bible, a creed, or revelation, but with personal experience with what happens to the individual and to the community” (*ibid.* 1124). This personal subjectivity and relativism would later be fully embraced and developed by the postmodernists, though they had little regard for the God of Bible.

Schleiermacher’s attempts to ‘reconfigure’ Christian theology inevitably led to the highly destructive Liberalism that blossomed in the early 20th Century. Schleiermacher really believed he was responding in the only way then possible to the gauntlet Kant had laid. “Kant’s restriction of reason to the world of sense experience presented a serious problem for any religious thought -- whether traditional orthodoxy or its deistic alternative -- that linked belief with reason” (Grenz, 1992:43). Schleiermacher’s response to Kant facilitated fresh thinking about the challenges of modernity, but certainly did not respond in a way that preserved the orthodox foundations of the faith.

Pre-eminent theologian, Karl Barth, respected Schleiermacher’s contribution, but was also one of his greatest critics. Barth believed Schleiermacher’s work was radically anthropocentric, “setting the course at the end of which certain theologians of the mid-twentieth century proclaimed God to be dead” (Grenz, 1992:50). What Schleiermacher had begun, would eventually culminate in the work of Albrecht Ritschl, often called the father of classical liberal theology. As controversial as Schleiermacher was, and is, he did help to resurrect the Christian faith at a time when rationalist thinking had nearly rendered it impotent, and also did much to unite practical aspects of the faith with the theoretical.

Existentialism

Romanticism inevitably gave way to another wave of modernity, another resurgence of humanistic rationalism, materialism and naturalism -- the pendulum swinging back the other way, as it always seems to do. Once again, life became mechanistic and devoid of ontological significance. It had less meaning, romance, feeling and sense of greater purpose, or *raison d'être*. Predictably, a new wave of frustration with modernity arose and with it came another romantic reaction: existentialism.

Existentialism makes a significant contribution to postmodernism and with Nihilism, is closely related to it. Grenz and various others acknowledge the contribution of Heidegger (*e.g.*, the father of German Existentialism) to postmodern thinking (1996:103-104). While Veith (1994:19, 37-38, 42, 73, *etc.*) and Erickson (2001:75-84, 93-96, 131, 310), give considerable attention to making the historical-philosophical connection. Veith says, for example: "Existentialism provides the rationale for contemporary relativism. Since everyone creates his or her own meaning, every meaning is equally valid" (Veith, 1994:38). And, "Existentialism is the philosophical basis for postmodernism" (*ibid*, 38).

Existentialism -- like the far more radical postmodernism -- is a movement of frustration, an attempt to find the individual self, to find meaning and purpose in life, beyond some mechanistically determined existence. Both existentialism and postmodernism are difficult to define. Practitioners from both camps are diverse, sometimes unified, though just as often diverse.

Modernity produces people who feel trapped, unable to see, think, or feel beyond the natural limits imposed upon them. Mankind then wonders: is there no more to life than this? Is this all there is?

Existentialism is in part a protest movement against modern, mass society. The organization of industry, technology, politics and bureaucracy tend to stifle individual thought and action and cultivate conformist mediocrity (Brown, 1968:184).

Existentialism understandably emerged after horrors WWI in Europe, called the ‘war to end all wars.’ In the wake of this great insanity came a time when people were forced to face as never before, the new horrors man had unleashed upon itself. It “sprang up in Germany after the First World War; it flourished in France immediately after the second” (Brown, 1968:181). Existentialism eventually made its way to North America, though it is still primarily considered a Continental philosophy.

There are two kinds of existentialism, Christian and atheistic, though both streams reject the modernist agenda with its assumptions about a Newtonian or perfectly ordered universe. Existentialists in general proposed that truth was relative, subjective and personal; that ultimate truth was either unknowable, or nonexistent. Thus, individuals must create their own truth, or reality, in this vast meaningless universe in which we live. This truth-relativism is a primary characteristic of both existentialism and postmodernism.

Existentialism, especially in its atheistic form, acknowledged science as an objective discipline, but refused to attribute to it the ability to answer questions of ultimate meaning. In fact, nearly all existentialists have long argued that science could not provide answers about humanity’s greater purpose -- our *raison d'être*. Many religionists suggested some notion about mankind’s greater purpose and gave some ethereal hope, or expectation for the future. Yet, ‘inevitable progress’ *via* technological advancement was modernity’s eschatology and the great driving force behind Western civilization.

Existentialism is neither a religion, nor a belief construct. Like postmodernism, it offers no answers, establishes no ethics, nor provides any real enlightenment, or guidance. “Existentialism is not a philosophy but a label for several widely different revolts against traditional philosophy” (Kaufmann, 1975:11). It is not a school of thought, as it were, nor is it reducible to a set of tenets. Existentialism both identifies and promotes the anguish, or *angst*, and helplessness that inevitably leads to loneliness, despair, and nihilism. The existentialist is typically very distrustful and sceptical, though certainly not to the degree the postmodernist is. Existentialism says that a “proposition or truth is said to be existential when I cannot apprehend or assent to it from the standpoint of a mere spectator but only on the ground of my total existence” (Brown, 1968:182).

The works of Arthur Schopenhauer, Soren Kierkegaard and the Germans Friedrich Nietzsche, Edmund Husserl, and Martin Heidegger inspired existentialism. It was popular around the mid-20th Century through the French philosophers Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. Other major contributors were: Karl Jaspers, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Gabrielle Marcel and Franz Kafka. Existentialism looks at life as a detached spectator. The most famous existentialist dictum is Sartre's -- 'existence precedes and rules essence' (*Being and Nothingness*. 1943) -- which is generally taken to mean that there is no predetermined human essence, that life is what we make it, and only after man 'exists,' does he define himself. For Sartre, man is thrown into the world, suffers and struggles there, and through it defines himself.

Nietzsche's concept of eternal return -- that things lose value because they cease to exist -- is another important existentialist dictum. If things just 'are,' without direction, or purpose, then truth is merely the product of the collective human experience. Thus, truth is a social construct, not an objective reality, a theme that reaches a great crescendo in postmodernism, and is amplified even further in the total distrust of all truth constructs.

Professor H.B. Acton summarizes existentialism this way:

The word is then used to emphasize the claim that each individual person is unique in terms of any metaphysical or scientific system; that he is a being who chooses as well as a being who thinks or contemplates; that he is free and that, because he is free, he suffers; and that since his future depends in part upon his free choices it is not altogether predictable. There are also suggestions, in this special usage, that existence is something genuine or authentic by contrast with insincerity, that a man who merely contemplates the world is failing to make the acts of choice which his situation demands. Running through all these different though connected suggestions is the fundamental idea that each person exists and chooses in time and has only a limited amount of it at his disposal in which to make decisions which matter so much to him. Time is short; there are urgent decisions to take; we are free to take them, but the thought of how much

depends upon our decision makes our freedom a source of anguish, for we cannot know with any certainty what will become of us (Acton, in Brown, 1968:182).

The existentialist suggests that man is the only creature who can define, or redefine himself. A cow, for example, cannot define who it is -- it is simply a cow. According to the existentialists, individuals define themselves according to the choices they make. Jean-Paul Sartre said we are nothing; later we become something and we alone make ourselves. Heidegger suggested that we are thrown [*geworfenheit*] into this world, having no explanation of our purpose. This creates concern, or *angst* (Ger., anxiety, or fear), and *besorgen* (Ger., provide). We spend our lives searching for meaning and purpose, but as Sartre argues, life is full of misery and hopelessness, and the despair of trying to find value outside of ourselves. Francis Schaeffer concluded in 1982 that “positivism is dead, and what is left is cynicism, or some mystical leap as to knowing. That is where modern man is, whether the individual man knows it or not” (Schaeffer, 1990:316). This *angst* is partly captured by Camus who says in *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*:

When images of the earth cling too tightly to memory, when the call of happiness becomes too insistent, it happens that melancholy rises in man's heart: this is the rock's victory, this is the rock itself. The boundless grief is too heavy to bear. These are our nights in Gethsemane. But crushing truths perish from being acknowledged. Sisyphus, proletarian of the gods, powerless and rebellious, knows the whole extent of his wretched condition: it is what he thinks of during his descent. The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn (Camus, 1955:90).

Foucault considered Heidegger the father of German existentialism (Grenz, 1996:103); Heidegger rejected the existentialist label, describing his philosophy as an investigation that begins with human existence. Sartre was the only self-proclaimed existentialist among the major thinkers. He claimed, again, that existence precedes essence. For him, no God exists and human nature is not fixed. Each person is free to do, as they will, yet

fully responsible for their actions, inevitably leading to human anguish and dread. Sartre explains further:

What is meant here by saying that existence precedes essence? It means that first of all, man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and, only afterwards, defines himself. Not only is man what he conceives himself to be, but he is also only what he wills himself to be after this thrust toward existence... Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself (Sartre, 1957:15).

Jean-Paul Sartre

Even as Existentialism deeply influenced postmodernism, so Jean-Paul Sartre profoundly influenced the postmodernists and thus requires special attention. Some have argued that Nietzsche, not Sartre, was the greatest of the Existentialists -- but Sartre was certainly significant. As a teenager in the 1920's, Sartre was attracted to philosophy while reading Henri Bergson's, *Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. Sartre studied in Paris at the elite *École Normale Supérieure*, which also trained other prominent French thinkers and intellectuals. He graduated in 1929 with a doctorate in philosophy. Sartre (1905-1980) was drafted into and served with the French army from 1929-1931, after which he worked as a teacher. In 1938, Sartre wrote the novel, *La Nausea*, which remains one of his most famous books, expressing the horrible taste of life, hence nausea. Sartre argued that no matter how man longs for something different, he could not escape the insanity of living in the world.

In 1939, he was among the many thousands drafted for French military service because of the German aggression. The Germans captured Sartre in 1940 at Padoux. He spent nine months in Stalag 12D at Treves, until released in April 1941 due to poor health. He escaped to Paris where he joined the French Resistance, helping to found the resistance

group *Socialisme et Liberte*. During the war Sartre wrote, *L'etre et le Neant* (1943, *Being and Nothingness*), which expressed his philosophy that “existence is prior to essence.” Sartre was certainly shaped by the war. He believed mankind was free, but responsible, and that we live in a godless universe, where life has no meaning or purpose beyond the goals and boundaries people establish for themselves. He believed we must detach ourselves from ‘things’ to find real meaning in life.

Sartre came to know Albert Camus, who at the time held similar beliefs. They remained friends until Camus turned away from Communism, marked by the publication of Camus’ book, *The Rebel*, something that divided the two men after 1951. Following WWII Sartre founded *Les Temps Modernes* (or, *Modern Times*), a monthly literary and political review, and was involved in political activism. Sartre became thoroughly engaged in politics, and endorsed Communism, though he never joined the party.

Sartre and Camus both experienced and wrote about the futility of life, a product of having lived through the horrors of WWII. Sartre portrayed his life in, *No Exit*, as a hell. Its last line has become well known: “Well, let’s get on with it” (Craig, 1994:60). Camus too saw life as absurd. “At the end of his brief novel, *The Stranger*, Camus’s hero discovers in a flash of insight that the universe has no meaning and there is no God to give it one” (*ibid.* 60).

Sartre eventually took a prominent role in the struggle against French colonialism in Algeria, becoming a leading supporter of the Algerian war of liberation. This stance exposed the inconsistencies of his beliefs, however, as Sartre promoted an ethical nihilism, and the irrelevance of ethics. After signing the *Algerian Manifest* -- a protest against continuing French occupation of Algeria -- his views were called into question:

Sartre took up a deliberately moral attitude and said it was an unjust and dirty war. His left-wing political position which he took up is another illustration of the same inconsistency. As far as many secular existentialists have been concerned, from the moment Sartre signed the *Algerian Manifesto* he was regarded as an apostate from his own position, and toppled from his place of leadership of the *avant-garde* (Schaeffer, 1990:58).

Francis Schaeffer said that Sartre and Camus could not live with the logical conclusions of their own systems. “The result of not being able to stand in the honest integrity of their despair on either level (that of nihilism or that of a total dichotomy between reason and meaninglessness) has led to modern thought being shifted yet one stage further into a third level of despair, a level of mysticism with nothing there” (Schaeffer, 1990:59). Though Sartre criticized Camus for being inconsistent in his presuppositions, Camus never gave up ‘hope,’ even though it went against the logic of his own position.

Sartre later opposed the Vietnam War, a conflict that had begun with the French colonization of the nation, and then escalated into a much broader conflict between the superpowers (*i.e.*, Soviet Union, China, USA). After Stalin’s death in 1953, Sartre criticized the Soviet system, but still defended the state. In 1956, he spoke on behalf of the Hungarians, condemning the invasion of their nation by the USSR, and condemned the Warsaw Pact assault on Czechoslovakia in 1968. Still, Sartre was inclined toward Marxism, but now more in agreement with French ‘libertarian socialism,’ a form of anarchism.

Sartre later criticized the French O.A.S. (*Organisation de l’Armee Secrete*) -- the group some claim exploded a bomb in Sartre’s apartment on *rue Bonaparte* in 1961 -- after which he moved to a place on *quai Louis-Bleriot*, opposite the Eiffel tower. Sartre spent much of his later life trying to reconcile existentialism with communism. The work that defines this period of his life was *Critique de la raison dialectique* (*Critique of Dialectical Reason* - 1960). While both Kierkegaard and Marx influenced his thinking, Kierkegaardian thought eventually came to dominate, something especially notable in Sartre’s later works. Shortly before his death, April 1980, Sartre repudiated Marxism. Through it all, he remained true to his convictions, and nearing death, wanted to be remembered by his writings. He died 15 April 1980 in Paris, and some 50,000 people attended his funeral. The headline of a Parisian newspaper said: “France has lost its conscience.” According to Schaeffer, in the end, Camus was more loved than Sartre, because he never did get the real world sorted out, as evidenced in his book, *The Plague*.

The Mind of Sartre

Sartre's views and writings were very offensive to many. The Roman Catholic Church, for instance, prohibited his books as early as 1948. Jean-Paul Sartre was clearly influenced by Descartes, Kant, Marx, Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, Kierkegaard and Ventre. He believed that "man is condemned to freedom" (Feinberg, 1980:46). For him, there were no values discoverable in the factual or objective realm. To his mind, values are never discovered; they are created by free choice.

Thus, existentialism's first move is to make every man aware of what he is and to make the full responsibility of his existence rest on him. And when we say that a man is responsible for himself, we do not only mean that he is responsible for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men (Sartre, 1947:19).

The existentialists argued that the path to truth in values, was not the same path one takes to attain scientific truth, and largely sought to bring a corrective balance to the purely scientific approach. "To put it another way, there is more to truth than pure scientific fasticity" (Feinberg, 1980:47). The Pythagorean theorem from Euclid's axioms, for instance, cannot tell us why a marriage falls apart, or a nation goes to war. Science cannot provide moral answers, insights, or boundaries; yet, rationalism thoroughly dominates Western societies, and attempts to 'inform' morality. Like Husserl and Heidegger, Sartre distinguished ontology from metaphysics, favouring the former. He did not combat metaphysics like Heidegger, however. Rather he takes a more Kantian approach, arguing that metaphysics raises questions we cannot presently answer.

As Dostoyevsky said, "If there is no immortality then all things are permitted" (Craig, 1994:61; *cf.*, Sartre, 1947:27). Sartre adds: "That is the very starting point of existentialism. Indeed, everything is permissible if God does not exist, and as a result man is forlorn, because neither within him nor without does he find anything to cling to. He can't start making excuses for himself" (Sartre, 1947:27). Should we live for self only, as Ayn Rand suggests, being accountable to no one else? Can science set the

boundaries of morality? By what standard of right and wrong do we then live? Sartre continues:

If existence really does precede essence, there is no explaining things away by reference to a fixed and given human nature. In other words, there is no determinism, man is free, man is freedom. On the other hand, if God does not exist, we find no values or commands to turn to which legitimize our conduct. So, in the bright realm of values, we have no excuse behind us, nor justification before us. We are alone, with no excuses (Sartre, 1947:27).

William Lane Craig, like Francis Schaeffer, contends that Sartre is utterly inconsistent, a trait common to postmoderns as well. Sartre argues there is no meaning to life, yet argues that one may create meaning for life. Craig wonders how Sartre can find meaning in life without God, yet never does so, which is an exercise in self-delusion. “Sartre is really saying, ‘Let’s pretend the universe has meaning’” (Craig, 1994:65). Craig goes on:

If God does not exist, then life is objectively meaningless; but man cannot live consistently and happily knowing that life is meaningless; so in order to be happy he pretends life has meaning. But this is, of course, entirely inconsistent -- for without God, man and the universe are without any real significance (Craig, 1994:65).

The Nazi atrocities during WWII are recurrent fuel for philosophical argumentation. From this, it is argued that without absolute values, our world becomes like Warsaw, or Auschwitz. Even Nietzsche had to surrender in the presence of this grand evil, breaking ranks with his mentor Richard Wagner, an anti-Semite and German nationalist. Sartre, too, condemned the actions of the Nazi’s, identifying his objections not as a matter of opinion, or personal taste, but as something greater.

In his important essay ‘Existentialism Is a Humanism,’ Sartre struggles vainly to elude the contradiction between his denial of divinely pre-established values and his urgent desire to affirm the value of human persons. Like [Bertrand] Russell, he could not live with the implications of his own denial of

ethical absolutes (Craig, 1994:67).

Sartre, Russell, Nietzsche, and many others, have argued that moral absolutes are possible without a transcendent source (*i.e.*, God). Sartre and others also argue that there is no inherent human nature, that man is not ‘imprinted,’ as it were, from birth, with character traits, or predispositions. “There is no human nature. In other words, each age develops according to dialectical laws, and what men are depends upon the age and not on a human nature” (Sartre, 1947:87). According to this assumption, people are a so-called, ‘blank slate’ from birth and consequently shaped by their environment and the choices they make.

William Lane Craig, along with Francis Schaeffer, J.W. Montgomery, and many others, disagrees. Craig claims the conscience is instilled within all human beings by God, providing an innate sense of right and wrong. This is precisely what the Apostle Paul said: “For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them” (Rom. 2:14-15). Thus, when Sartre and others condemn the Nazi atrocities, they actually do so from their God-given conscience, and from their Judeo-Christian cultural conditioning. Rev. Richard Wurmbrand, who was tortured for years in Ceausescu’s [Communist] Romanian prisons, said:

The cruelty of atheism is hard to believe when man has no faith in the reward of good or the punishment of evil. There is no reason to be human. There is no restraint from the depths of evil which is in man. The communist torturers often said, ‘There is no God, no hereafter, no punishment for evil. We can do what we wish.’ I have heard one torturer even say, ‘I thank God, in whom I don’t believe, that I have lived to this hour when I can express all the evil in my heart.’ He expressed it in unbelievable brutality and torture inflicted on prisoners (Wurmbrand, in Craig, 1994:68).

If one assumes the inherent goodness of man, moral relativism is theoretical possible. If man's inherent goodness were true, humanity could and perhaps would rise to the challenge -- freely doing what was good, and respecting the sovereignty of others. However, if humans are born inherently good, or without 'nature,' as Sartre puts it, where does all the evil in the world come from? Why is man so incessantly evil? If all are free to do as they want, will not the expression of these freedoms at some point impinge upon the freedoms of others? Therefore true and absolute freedom -- the moral subjectivity Sartre espouses -- is irrational, and a fiction that produces anarchy (or lawlessness).

Sartre, Joseph Fletcher, A.J. Ayer and others, are of the opinion that moral boundaries are of little, or no ultimate value. Yet, Sartre calls man self and even neighbour responsible. Absolute ethical relativity is impossible according to these criteria. Worldviews need to be rational and consistent, meaning they must be based upon absolutes. For Nietzsche the absolute was the "will-to-power," or "eternal recurrence." John Dewey made 'progress' his absolute. As Paul Tillich observed, "everyone has an ultimate commitment, an unconditional centre of his life. Without this centre he would not be a person" (Feinberg, 1980:408). Sartre's absolute was freedom, but his construct is not consistent, and what he builds is an inconsistent 'house of cards' that cannot stand.

If truth is a social construct, and if all moral boundaries are relative, why should people be 'good'? Even further, what is 'good'? If there are no absolutes, no metaphysical realities, no God, no 'hereafter,' and no final judgment, then we might just as well live for the moment and get all we can out our brief, miserable lives, as so many people do anyway. Is life worth living? Is there no more? Does Sartre provide answers, or just add to the uncertainties mankind already feels?

Chapter II

Postmodernity: The Essentials

Postmodernity is perhaps more accurately called ultra, or hyper-modernity. Depending upon whom you ask, postmodernity is either the worst thing that has ever happened, or a long overdue challenge and corrective to the modernist, or Enlightenment, Western worldview. It is a widely used concept and terminology originally used by artists, philosophers and social scientists. It speaks to cultural changes that have taken place over the past several decades, beginning in the early 20th Century. It is not 'pro' anything, but it is thoroughly anti-modern.

Ernst Gellner believes postmodernity is not just a culture shift in the West, but the product of a larger global shift -- a landslide if you will -- begun by the collapse of Colonialism. The first wave of colonial contraction began (c.1947) with the European states, and was followed a few decades later with the collapse of the Soviet bloc (c.1989). Several prominent postmodernists were deeply, personally influenced by colonialism, especially by French involvement in Algeria (*e.g.*, Sartre, Foucault). As such, we find that postmodernity, post-colonialism, and post-Christendom, are all more inter-related than they initially seem to be, and the reason why each needs to be considered herein.

Postmodernism -- the philosophical dimension of this anti-modern cultural wave -- is anti-foundationalist, especially in its post-structuralist stream. Postmoderns do not believe in absolutes, claiming that objective and absolute truths are practically impossible.

The postmodern challenge to modernity manifests itself in two separate but equally devastating, forms. One is cultural and the other is philosophical (epistemological). On the cultural front, postmodern manifestations in the form of new social movements whether in art forms, politics or lifestyles, are joyously disrupting the neat

order of things that reason had established in the heyday of modernity. On the epistemological front, postmodern incursions are subverting not only the foundations of truth, but also the possibility of ever establishing any truth claims (Khan, 2000).

Where previous worldview constructs had a specific objective foundation -- Christianity-God; Marxism-Economics; Humanism-Rationalism and scientific method -- the postmodern stream rejects them all, seeking to deconstruct them -- yet, offers to replace them with nothing! Further, postmoderns do not believe in worldviews at all, that there is any grand schema giving singular meaning to all things. For them, the only meaning life has is what we attach to it, especially according to our own experiences. Reality is a matter of individual perception, and the only absolutes are those derived from personal, subjective experience. “Eternal and ultimate truths are unknowable, and any claim to know them is simply an assertion of the will to power” (Nietzsche, in Newbigin, 1996:77).

Modernity is generally perceived as positivistic, technocentric and rationalistic, identified with belief in linear progress, absolute truths and the rational planning of ideal social orders (*e.g.*, Fascism, Marxism), as well as the standardization of knowledge and production. The highly rational Newtonian Cosmology can identify modernity as well. By contrast, postmodernism is fragmentary and indeterminate, with an intense distrust of things universal and totalizing (Veith, 1994:42). Postmodernism is loosely, and disrespectfully taken from Einstein’s Theories of Relativity and Quantum Physics, that went beyond Newtonian physics to reveal the relative nature of matter, time, and space.

Postmoderns reject metanarratives and totalizing agendas, but at the same time reject the notion that they create and promote an agenda of their own -- thinking deeply rooted in relativism, pluralism and nihilism. They argue that people must be suspicious of totalizing discourses that seek to name, define, and legitimate social institutions, roles, identities and practices. Language, for the postmodern, is a labyrinth of meanings. Jean-Francois Lyotard in discussing postmodernism defined it as “incredulity toward metanarratives” (Lyotard, 1979:xxiv). Communities may apply these metanarrative constructs to themselves, but certainly may not impose these views upon others.

Postmoderns promote individualism and community at the same time. 'Power' is a negative concept for postmoderns, for these are the tools of corrupt and self-serving institutions, but at the same time, they themselves promote an agenda that can only be attained *via* the exercise of cultural and intellectual powers.

The term and notion, 'postmodern,' can be traced to *circa* 1932, when it was used to describe the contrast in Hispanic poetry between Borges and others, a work that seemed a reaction to modernism -- *ultramodernismo*, as it was called. Later, Arnold J. Toynbee the historian, called the period from 1875 to the present (for him, c.1940), 'postmodern.' Others have used the term sporadically as well, though not until more recently has there even been a general consensus about its meaning. Some have used the term to signify the continuation of modernity, though perhaps in new directions, while others have used it to mean the end of modernity. The term 'postmodernism' as a philosophical discourse first entered the philosophical lexicon in 1979, especially because of the publication of *The Postmodern Condition* by Jean-Francois Lyotard.

Among the most recognized as postmodernists, or contributors to postmodern thought, are: Roland Barthes (1915-1980), French; Jean Baudrillard (1929-), French; Jacques Derrida (1930-), French; Michel Foucault (1926-1984), French; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), German; Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), German; Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), German; Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), German; Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), Danish; Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), French; Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924-1998), French; Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), German; Richard Rorty (1931-), American; Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), Swiss; and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), Austrian-born British. Others would add, or subtract names to this list. Yet, most I think would agree that Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Richard Rorty are the three principal voices of postmodernism.

Postmodernism attempts to understand and describe the condition of being postmodern. Thus, postmodernism philosophically describes the cultural movement, with postmodernity as a response, or reaction to the condition, or state, of being postmodern. It is a highly sceptical, doubtful and critical movement, especially in its philosophical form. It is notoriously difficult to describe and categorize, for that is part of

its intended nature. Adherents of modernity and traditionalists alike have characterized the postmodern discourse as arbitrary, superficial, cynical, pointless, and hostile to history. Postmodernism does not fully abandon modernism, but is highly critical of it.

Although the ideas of modernity still have a strong residual hold at the level of acknowledged assumptions, for an increasing number of people there is no longer any confidence in the alleged ‘eternal truths of reason’ of which Lessing spoke (Newbigin, 1996:77).

J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig describe postmodernism as “a loose coalition of diverse thinkers from several different academic disciplines” (Craig, 2003:144). It is, by nature, the rejection of truth, objective rationality and “authorial meaning in texts along with the existence of stable verbal meanings and universally valid logic definitions” (*ibid.* 145). It is an “historical, chronological notion and a philosophical ideology” (*ibid.*). Further, postmoderns “reject the idea that there are universal, transcultural standards, such as the laws of logic or principles of inductive inference, for determining whether a belief is true or false, rational or irrational, good or bad” (*ibid.* 146). The *ethos*, or driving force, of postmodernity, is a ‘gnawing pessimism’ (Grenz, 1996:7). Muqtedar Khan suggests that postmodernism, and liberalism generally, are emaciating the human spirit, not emancipating it (Khan, 2000).

‘PoMod’ or ‘PoMo’ as it is often called, is deeply distrustful of modernity and reason; a cultural movement in the West that is intentionally pluralistic and subjective, where the call for ‘tolerance’ and ‘political correctness’ are pushed to extremes. “Postmodernists fret mightily about arrogance and dogmatism, but to avoid them they typically rebound into the equal and opposite errors of cheap tolerance and relativism” (Groothuis, 2000:12). Those who hold modernist convictions are thoroughly criticized as dinosaurs from an obsolete and intolerant age. They claim the universe is not ‘mechanistic’ and ‘dualistic,’ but “historical, relational, and personal” (Grenz, 1996:7). Indeed, “at the heart of postmodern philosophy is a sustained attack on the premises and presuppositions of modernism” (Grenz, 1996:123). Jacques Derrida defines postmodernism as a revolt against the western metaphysical notion of a being, or *logos*, that grounds knowledge,

meaning and language. The postmodern project is not a constructive; it is a de-constructive criticism of, and challenge to, the presuppositions upon which the Enlightenment has long rested.

Postmodernism is at once violently opposed to the absolutes of institutionalized religion and welcoming of an individual [non-traditional] spirituality long disallowed by traditional Western religion. Orthodox, traditional religious adherents are highly distrusted by postmoderns. To be Evangelical, for example, is wrong-headed, because postmoderns believe that to be orthodox and zealous means adherence to absolutes that might offend someone else, or infringe upon their personal freedoms. Irrational postmodernism goes beyond the rationally oriented attacks of modernity. “Modernism is a revolt against revealed religion. It is a revolt against the truth. Postmodernism is a further revolt, fundamentally against modernism and secondarily against Christianity and the truth as well” (Mark Dever, in Carson, 2000:142).

Where religion is concerned, postmoderns often follow Friedrich Nietzsche who said: “Where has God gone? I shall tell you. We have killed him -- you and I. We are all his murderers... God is dead. That which was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet possessed has bled to death under our knives. There has never been a greater deed” (Nietzsche, 1882:125). To Nietzsche Christianity was nothing more than an *ethos* that glorified weakness. He believed mankind was in the transitional stage from animality to the superman (*ubermensch*, German) of the future. He believed man must propel himself into the future by abolishing the archaic notions of God, or divine rule, to create a new value foundation upon which to build a new world.

The source of the concept ‘good’ has been sought and established in the wrong place: the judgment ‘good’ did not originate with those to whom ‘goodness’ was shown! Rather it was ‘the good’ themselves, that is to say, the noble, powerful, high-stationed and high-minded, who felt and established themselves and their actions as good... It was out of this *pathos* of distance that they first seized the right to create values and to coin names for values... the protracted and domineering fundamental total feeling on the part of a

higher ruling order in relation to a lower order, to a 'below' that is the origin of the antithesis 'good' and 'bad' (Nietzsche, 1887:2).

Postmoderns equate those who dare to judge the moral and ethical practices of others in society as intolerants and fanatics. Really, the criticisms they bring against the church are not wholly unwarranted. Christians have at times been guilty of arrogance and intolerance. Richard John Neuhaus said, "few things have contributed so powerfully to the unbelief of the modern and postmodern world as the pretension of Christians to know more than we do... If Christians exhibited more intellectual patience, modesty, curiosity, and sense of adventure, there would be few atheists in the world, both of the rationalist and postmodern varieties" (Neuhaus, in Groothuis, 2000:12).

Postmoderns are quick to eclectically embrace whatever suits them, and/or promotes their own relativistic agendas. This is especially true when 'ammunition' is needed to deconstruct, undermine, or outright attack the so-called rigid, stale thinking of the past. Whatever the subject, whatever the focus, the postmodernist creates an argument, but does not usually construct it rationally as the modernist would. "While modernity decentred God and in its place crowned reason as the sovereign authority that alone determined the legitimacy of truth claims, postmodernity has chosen to dethrone not only reason but the very notion of authority and the very idea of truth" (Khan, 2000).

The differences between postmodernity and modernity are, in some ways, 'in-house' arguments among relatives. The postmoderns understand the limitations of modernity, especially challenging them at the point of 'certainty.' Modernists have done much the same to others, especially to Christianity, for years. The modernists continue to rail against the faith communities because of their so-called improvable tenets; yet, the postmoderns do much the same to the modernists. Indeed, the modernists have spent considerable energy in recent decades, defending themselves from their postmodern critics, and even other critics from outside the West. David Bosch comments:

It was not only the monsters created and then
let loose by science that have helped
Enlightenment science to come to its senses.
Spokespersons from the Third World also
began to challenge the neutrality of science by
asking whose interests it was serving. They

pointed out that science, far from being unbiased, was built on the cultural and imperialist assumptions of the West, that it was, in particular, a tool of exploitation and should be investigated in relation to the praxis out of which it comes (Bosch, 2000:359).

This raises another important issue, one that postmoderns enjoy criticizing: the modernist notion of ‘inevitable progress.’ This highly esteemed and well-guarded premise has been foundational to modernist thinking for years. It has culturally conditioned people in the West -- and far beyond -- that a [content] state of ‘being’ is not enough. According to this premise, our lives must constantly push toward ‘becoming,’ which only enhances and promotes restlessness. This pressure is simply too much for many people, who find all manner of ways to ‘medicate’ themselves against modernist cultural pressures to ‘succeed,’ to ‘become,’ and to ‘progress.’ This notion of inevitable progress long ago became the [Enlightenment] humanist eschatology -- their hope for the future of humanity and all that exists. This is precisely why highly industrialized societies have such a high rate of alcohol and drug abuse, be it legal, or illegal. In their frustration with life, these ‘progressive’ and ‘industrialised’ peoples do not turn to God. Instead, to ‘medicate’ themselves they turn to sex, violence, sporting activities, gambling, *etc.* What do the postmoderns say of the modernist notion of progress?

How then in the postmodern vision will the project of civilization survive or progress?
The answer is more than startling. All projects are illegitimate because they undermine competing projects and because it is power, not any intrinsic worth, that determines which project becomes the civilizational project. Progress is a myth. Without God, without reason, without a worldview, how do we live? The postmodern answer is let life itself find the way. So just live, “just do it” and life will lead you to life (Khan, 2000).

Some, like Middleton and Walsh, say the “progress myth is losing its power” (Middleton, 1995:20) -- but I disagree. One has only to consider the ongoing industrialization, or modernization of China, India and many other nations, which bears witness to modernity’s ongoing global vitality. The postmodern cultural wave has

produced in the West a weaker (*i.e.*, disestablished) Christianity, greater moral relativism and widespread pluralism. Yet, with this shift, with the wave of instability that postmodernity has produced, has come a renewed commitment to science and progress -- because men still need something to believe in, and a reason to exist. The postmodern wave has [briefly] challenged the march of modernity, but like a great ship moving through the waters of historical global culture, is not about to be stopped, certainly not by the likes of postmodernity.

Deconstruction

Deconstruction is a major, functional component of postmodernism that originated in France during the late 1960's. Largely the creation of Ferdinand de Saussure and Jacques Derrida, it purposes to critically assess modernity, and critique the metaphysics (*i.e.*, Judeo-Christian) that have so deeply impacted Western thinking. Both the philosophy and practice of deconstruction are rooted in a negative approach to life. Deconstruction is extremely difficult to define and understand, yet has been widely discussed.

Deconstruction is a critical component of the postmodern hope to de-throne existing Western thought, to later produce a worldview more to their liking.

Philosophically, postmodernism tends to follow two streams of thought. The first is post-structuralism, with its anti-foundationalist ideas, often expressed *via* deconstruction. Among its adherents have been Lyotard, Baudrillard, Foucault and Jameson. The other philosophical stream is generally associated with modern critical theory, especially that of Jurgen Habermas, who argues the modern project is not finished, that such a massive, pervasive universal cannot be so easily done away with. Habermas argued that postmodernity represents a resurgence of counter-Enlightenment ideas, which have emerged since the 1700's in various forms, including Romanticism.

Deconstruction is a poststructuralist theory, which began with the linguistic work of

Ferdinand de Saussure at the turn of the Twentieth Century. Structuralism derives identity from difference. For example, 'north' has no meaning without 'south.' In the 1960's structuralism came under attack by poststructuralists, whose philosophy and practice does not intentionally seek to 'destroy,' but rather to 'undo.' Most of Jacques Derrida's work in deconstruction continues the thinking of Nietzsche and Heidegger. What Heidegger called 'Platonism,' 'metaphysics,' or 'onto-theology,' Derrida called 'the metaphysics of presence,' 'logocentrism,' or, sometimes 'phallogocentrism.' Derrida denied that deconstruction was a methodology, but the term is routinely used to describe his method of textual criticism, which seeks to expose the underlying assumptions, or biases, of thought. His thinking was drawn mainly from Heidegger's notion of *Destraktion*, but also from others. Derrida once said of deconstruction: "I have no simple and formalizable response to this question. All my essays are attempts to have it out with this formidable question" (Derrida, 1985:4).

Derrida argued, as did Heidegger, that thinkers need to free themselves from these thought restrictions -- to 'twist free,' as it were. Derrida seeks to accomplish what Heidegger was not able to, however, becoming the first 'post-metaphysical' thinker. Derrida sought to do what countless others before him had attempted, even back to the Greeks: to find words that take meaning from the world, from non-language, where meaning has not been a construction of human bias.

Postmodernists seek to deconstruct language, which is meaning-laden. For them, meaning is socially constructed and always biased. Because language shapes the way we think and because we are all biased, language cannot be trusted, nor can man be trusted to know the truth. All claims to truth *via* language are human culturally influenced constructs that have no objective meaning, except for the meaning conferred upon something (Gellner, 1992:24). Truth is, therefore, made, or constructed -- not found, or discovered.

Deconstruction is a particular practice in reading, a method of textual criticism, and a mode of analytical inquiry. It is a theory and process that seeks to subvert, dismantle and destroy any notions that a text has coherence, unity, truth, or determinate meaning. Deconstruction formally involves discovering, recognizing, and understanding the

underlying, unspoken and implicit, assumptions and frameworks that form the author's thoughts and beliefs.

American postmodernist, Richard Rorty, does not believe humanity can escape its linguistic heritage in examining the world. We [necessarily] see the world through a conceptual framework imposed by language. Even if our doubts are put to rest, our knowledge of an alleged external reality is obscured linguistically. He follows Wittgenstein's observation that language cannot describe its own limits, which is to say; we cannot describe a reality beyond the limitations of language (Rorty, 1991:59).

Jacques Bouveresse in France and Jürgen Habermas in Germany severely criticized Derrida, as did many British and American philosophers. To them, Derrida's work was a regression into irrationalism, for the anti-foundationalism the deconstructionists promoted inevitably leads to the rejection of every [rational] development to that point in history. Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida and others, who employ deconstruction, judge all [philosophical] work before them as erroneous, placing themselves over all other thinkers in history -- the height of arrogance.

Derrida and other deconstructionists perform a radical critique of the Enlightenment project and of metaphysics in the Western tradition. They especially focused on texts by Plato, Rousseau and Husserl, but were certainly not limited to them. Derrida, in particular, sought to undermine, or deconstruct, the metaphysical assumptions of Western philosophies, unveiling and deconstructing the Western metaphysical hegemony over others. Michel Foucault later added his thinking about the misuse of power, especially as a means of manipulating others. Fredric Jameson's neo-Marxist ideas further undermined traditional concepts.

Derrida's, *Of Grammatology* (1967), examines the relationship between speech and writing, and investigates the way speech and writing develop as forms of language. Derrida argues that traditionally writing has been viewed as an expression of speech, leading to the assumption that speech is closer than writing to the truth, or *logos*, of meaning and representation. He contends that the development of language actually occurs *via* the interplay of speech and writing, that neither can properly be described as more important to the development of language. According to Derrida, 'logocentrism'

considers the Greek *logos* (i.e., λόγος -- the Greek term used variously for speech, thought, law, reason) the central principle of language and philosophy, speech, not writing, is central to language. He then used ‘grammatology’ -- his terminology for the science of writing -- to suggest that our writing can become as comprehensive as our concepts of speech. Derrida goes on to criticize the linguistic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure and the structuralist theory of Claude Levi-Strauss for promoting logocentrism. He argues that Levi-Strauss’ theory in particular, promotes a misunderstanding of the relation between speech and writing.

Derrida often used the term, ‘logocentrism,’ something he believed Plato established, which gives language privilege over nonverbal communication, and prefers speech to writing. Derrida believed that in the Western tradition, language follows the thought processes, which produce speech, and that speech produces writing. According to Derrida, logocentrism takes the position that the Greek *logos* rests in speech, not the written word, and is more central to language as such.

For Derrida, deconstruction is a linguistic and literary methodology. It is a process of revealing meaning, knowledge and thought, especially so that these tools cannot be used to empower its users to impose their thinking on others, revealing the moral and political dimension of deconstruction. Where literary truth and knowledge can be shown to contain subjective motivations, they can be unveiled, or deconstructed. Deconstruction views all writing as a complex, historical and cultural process. Texts are inter-related and ‘controlled’ by tradition and institutions. Derrida wrote:

The privilege of the phone does not depend upon a choice that could have been avoided. It responds to a moment of economy... The system of “hearing (understanding) -oneself-speak” through the phonic substance -- which presents itself as the nonexterior, nonmundane, therefore nonempirical or noncontingent signifier -- has necessarily dominated the history of the world during an entire epoch, and has even produced the idea of the world, the idea of world-origin, that arises from the difference between the worldly and the non-worldly, the outside and the inside, ideality and nonideality, universal and nonuniversal,

transcendental and empirical, *etc...*

It is therefore as if what we call language could have been in its origin and in its end only a moment, an essential but determined mode, a phenomenon, an aspect, a species of writing, and as if it had succeeded in making us forget this, and in willfully misleading us, only in the course of an adventure: as that adventure itself (Derrida, 1967:8).

Deconstructionists further argue that all texts are mediated by language and cultural systems, which are manifested as ideologies and symbols, expressed in genres, ideas and practices, and are limited in their ability to truly express the author's thoughts. They argue that texts which 'confess' the highly mediated, or biased, nature of our human experience move closer to deconstructing themselves. This 'confession' moves the text closer to reality than other texts, which remain conditioned by culture and tradition. The process is, especially in a formal literary sense, an attempt to literarily express oneself, freed from the traditions and biases that culturally condition all people. Those who subsequently read these offerings must in turn attempt to be hermeneutically unbiased, exegeting fairly and without bias; but deconstruction does not stop here, routinely doing violence to the text (Lye, 1996). Postcolonial studies sometimes employ this same deconstructive technique, especially relative to the abuse of power and exploitation of others by the Colonials.

In our day, deconstruction has come to mean 'tearing down,' often in a disrespectful and nihilistic manner. Some would argue that it misses Derrida's original intention, which is to [humbly] consider afresh the claims of traditional texts, especially those held by society to be properly understood. Others would argue that Derrida's own conceit laid the foundation for today's radical hermeneutics. Yet, it is this, "take a fresh look at the old texts" aspect of Derrida's work that is worthy of consideration. In a similar manner, the Renaissance scholars 're-considered' the ancient Greek texts, even as the Reformers did with the biblical texts in the original languages. From an interview, Derrida said of his work:

Deconstruction questions the thesis, theme, the positionality of everything. . . . We have to study the models and the history of the

models and then try not to subvert them for the sake of destroying them but to change the models and invent new ways of writing -- not as a formal challenge, but for ethical, political reasons. I wouldn't approve of simply throwing texts into disorder. First, deconstructing academic professional discourse doesn't mean destroying the norms or pushing these norms to utter chaos. I'm not in favor of disorder. I started with the tradition. If you're not trained in the tradition, then Deconstruction means nothing. It's simply nothing. I think that if what is called 'deconstruction' produces neglect of the classical authors, the canonical texts, and so on, we should fight it.... I'm in favor of the canon, but I won't stop there. I think that students should read what are considered the great texts in our tradition... Students could develop, let's say, a deconstructive practice -- but only to the extent that they 'know' what they are 'deconstructing:' an enormous network of other questions. I'm in favor of tradition. I'm respectful of and a lover of the tradition. There's no deconstruction without the memory of the tradition. I couldn't imagine what the university could be without reference to the tradition, but a tradition that is as rich as possible and that is open to other traditions, and so on. Logocentrism literally, as such, is nothing else but Greek. Everywhere that the Greek culture is the dominant heritage there is logocentrism. I wouldn't draw as a conclusion, as a consequence of this, that we should simply leave it behind. I think that people who try to represent what I'm doing or what so called 'deconstruction' is doing, as, on the one hand, trying to destroy culture or, on the other hand, to reduce it to a kind of negativity, to a kind of death, are mis-representing deconstruction. Deconstruction is essentially affirmative. It's in favor of reaffirmation of memory, but this reaffirmation of memory asks the most adventurous and the most risky questions about our tradition, about our institutions, about our

way of teaching, and so on (Olson, 1996:132).

Deconstruction follows Higher Criticism, the modernist contribution that has worked long and hard to undermine biblical credibility. Where the Bible and similar other metanarratives are concerned, Higher Criticism and deconstruction seem very happy to work together in attempting to destroy their foundations. Higher Criticism questions the integrity, authenticity, credibility and literary forms of all historic texts, yet has especially targeted the Bible. It has not been an entirely useless exercise, for the criticisms have compelled biblical scholars to ‘dig deeper’ in understanding the origins of the Bible, producing innumerable literary and archaeological proofs in the process.

Ludwig Wittgenstein argued that in language there can only be what exists in the ‘downstairs world,’ or natural realm, for that is all that is reasonable and real (Schaeffer, 1990:313). Wittgenstein saw only silence in the upstairs, or supernatural world, another way of saying that God is silent, or non-existent. Schaeffer argued in response that humanity needs the upstairs realm -- or God -- from which to get its values. If we live in a closed universe, as so many humanists argue, then we live the existence of fish in a bowl. Our morality is based upon our own limited knowledge and experience and as such, is horribly limited. Humanity has no way to transcend its limited existence. God, *via* the Bible, however, offers wisdom, truth and morality that far surpass mankind’s so-called wisdom. The metaphysical silence Wittgenstein and others sensed, led them and countless others to reach the point of frustration, or despair, as Schaeffer put it.

For the postmodernist, metanarratives are “mere human constructs” (Middleton, 1995:71). When metanarratives are ‘de-constructed,’ they become nothing more than a “legitimation of the vested interests of those who have the power and authority to make such universal pronouncements” (*ibid.*). The postmoderns argue that the greatest problem with metanarratives is the way they are used to legitimise violence, and/or the use of power against others (*ibid.* 72). Metanarratives have a history of suppressing and oppressing minority stories. Throughout history, metanarratives like the Bible, and Qu’ran, have sometimes been used as weapons and tools of social and personal agendas. These agendas are legitimized using the metanarrative and then forced upon the weak. Thus, it is [rightly] argued, we should all be ‘sympathetic’ to the voice of the

marginalized and to the historical reality that metanarratives have, and still do, legitimise violence (*ibid.* 75).

Similar to postcolonialists, postmoderns view language as a tool of the power elite to control others. Indeed, “there is a struggle for power, a desire to get one’s own way or what one wants, and in this struggle, purported knowledge is also used to accomplish one’s ends. The manipulation of truth is a real, not an imaginary, phenomenon” (Erickson, 2002:93). Some postmoderns view the likes of Stalin, Mao, and the Nazi regime, as classic examples of the way whole societies are manipulated through language and the use of power.

Epistemology is thus a matter of power rather than of rationality. We know what we know because we participate in a language game that defines the limits of our knowledge. There is no independent reality against which the accuracy of the language we use can be measured (Okholm, 1995:108).

Postmodernists “are right to warn us of the dangers of using language to gain power over others, to recommend the importance of story and narrative, and to warn against the historical excesses of scientism and reductionism that grew out of an abuse of modernist ideas” (Craig, 2003:152). However, the extremes postmodernism encourages lead nowhere healthy. Rather it leads to a foundationless and meaningless existence, where no truth is possible, save that which is constructed by ‘community,’ or the individual (*cf.*, Jud. 21:25). Because of this, Christians must be especially wary of postmodern notions, and “should not adopt a neutral or even favourable standpoint towards postmodernism, rejecting its problems and embracing its advantages” (Craig, 2003:152).

Perhaps the most damaging criticism of deconstruction is that if all texts subvert honesty and truth, then deconstructionist texts are just as false and dishonest. The irony with postmodern deconstruction is that its proponents exempt *it* from the same scrutiny used on others. “If deconstruction is used to expose the problems of other views, why should it not be turned on itself?” (Erickson, 2002:97). Why then, critics ask, should anyone ‘privilege’ deconstructive texts? Further, how can Derrida’s deconstructive philosophy be either accurate or trustworthy? If deconstruction cannot reveal the truth,

then how is it found? Who holds the deconstructionist critics accountable?

Postmodern Epistemology

“Epistemology is the theory of how we know, or how we can be sure that what we think we know of the world is correct” (Schaeffer, 1990:6). Truth, knowledge and absolutes require that something is either true, or not true. Postmoderns, however, dismantle and reject all such notions. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) is probably the person most responsible for undermining the traditional Western worldview that had been dominated by the Kantian theory of transcendental categories. Nietzsche believed truth was nothing more than an illusion, that truth is a metaphor -- an illusion of our perception. Things seem real only because of our familiarity with them.

Descartes made the self an objective observer of the universe, which Kant reinforced. Nietzsche dethroned all this, promoting nihilism, which “accepts the conclusion that everything is meaningless and chaotic” (Schaeffer, 1990:57). Rooted in Nietzschean thought, the postmodernist rejects traditional epistemology, sceptically and critically attacking ‘facts’ as inseparable from the observer and his/her culture which supply the categories to discern them (Gellner, 1992:24). For the postmodernist, culture-independent ‘facts’ do not exist, because the observer cannot be objective about even himself (*ibid.*).

This crisis of truth can be comforting to none. The decline of the spiritual and moral dimensions of Western society increasingly suggest that a society which is gradually relinquishing the quest for truth may eventually have nothing to pursue. Freedom for freedom’s sake has never sustained a civilization. It does not promise to make amends in the future either. Freedoms based on widely held truths have in the past generated great civilizations but never

without essential foundations (Khan, 2000).

In formal logic there is right and wrong, true and false: A is not non-A. Postmodernism undermines even this basic, long-held assumption. Prof. J. Bottum of Boston College said the progression into postmodernity can be summarized this way: “It is premodern to seek beyond rational knowledge for God; it is modern to desire to hold knowledge in the structures of human rationality, with or without God; it is postmodern to see the impossibility of any such knowledge” (Bottum, 1994:28). Muqtedar Khan adds:

If the cultural assault of postmodernism is devastating, than its epistemological assault cannot be described as anything but as “writing the epitaph of modernity.” While modernity de-centred God and in its place crowned reason as the sovereign authority that alone determined the legitimacy of truth claims, postmodernity has chosen to dethrone not only Reason but the very notion of authority and the very idea of truth (Khan, 2000).

To further give you a sense of how postmodernism is affecting Western peoples epistemologically; consider this brief story from renowned Christian philosopher Ravi Zacharias, who recalls a lecture he once delivered at a university, where a student stormed up to the microphone:

I recall, for example lecturing at a university when a student stormed up to the microphone and bellowed, “Who told you culture is a search for coherence? Where do you get that idea from? This idea of coherence is a Western idea.”
Rather surprised, I replied by reminding her that all I had done was to present a sociologist’s definition. “Ah! Words! Just words!” she shouted back. “Let me ask you this then,” I pleaded with her. “Do you want my answer to be coherent?” At that moment, laughter rippled through the auditorium. She herself was stymied for a few moments. “But that’s language, isn’t it?” she retorted. So I asked her if language had anything to do

with reality. “Don’t words refer to something?” I asked her. “If you are seeking an intelligible answer from me, mustn’t there be correspondence between my words and reality? How then can this basic requirement be met in our culture?” Of course, this student is only reflecting the spirit of postmodern thought -- No truth, no meaning, no certainty. We now hear that language is detached from reality and truth detached from meaning. So what we are left with is a way of thinking basically shaped by our bodies and by our proclivities. That is how defining our untamed passions have become and hence incoherence is now normal (Zacharias, 2006).

Postmoderns doubt that any objective, or singular, truth exists. For them truth is a social construct, and is community-relative. Since there are myriads of communities, there are myriads of truths. The postmodern claims there are no absolutes, no one truth, or standard of truth, to judge one against another -- leaving only relativism.

Postmodernity refers to a shift away from attempts to ground epistemology and faith in a humanly engineered process. The condition of post-modernity is distinguished by an evaporating of the ‘grand narrative’ -- the overarching ‘story line’ by means of which we are placed in history as beings having a definite past and a predictable future. The post-modern outlook sees a plurality of heterogeneous claims to knowledge, in which science does not have a privileged place (Giddens, in Gelder, 1996:153).

Richard Rorty does not argue for total nihilism, as is sometimes attributed to him, but does emphasize the social influence of nihilism upon the individual and his beliefs. For Rorty truth is an inter-subjective agreement among members of a community that enables them to speak a common language and establish a commonly accepted reality (Rorty, 1991:21). The end-all for Rorty is not the discovery or even the approximation of absolute truth, but rather the formulation of beliefs that further solidify the community, which is “to reduce objectivity to solidarity” (Rorty, 1991:22). Rorty’s ideal seems to be

maximum voluntary community agreement, rather than some tolerated disagreement (Rorty, 1991:38-39). Rorty's concept of truth has become nearly pervasive throughout Western societies, where solidarity without truth, is more important than truth attained through argument and objections.

The Judeo-Christian, or biblical worldview, by contrast, is built upon the presupposition that there is right and wrong, true and false. Francis Schaeffer discussed often how postmodern [relativist] epistemology was undermining both the Christian faith and epistemology in general. Absolutes require antithesis, the existence of the contrast of opposites. Antithetical thought ultimately argues that God exists in contrast to His not existing. It relies further on the reality of God's creation of what exists, in contrast to what does not exist -- and then to His creating people to live, observe and think in the reality (Schaeffer, 1990:228).

Contrary to this, Georg Hegel's dialectic model advocates compromise, rather than absolutes and antithesis. Beginning with the traditional dichotomy between thesis and antithesis, Hegel works toward a synthesis, or compromise of the two extremes. Rather than the polar opposites of right and wrong, true and false, holy and unholy, there are now just relativistic compromises: the synthesis of thesis and antithesis. For about a century this has been practiced in the West, though limited to the moral, not scientific realm. "Getting along" without controversy, especially in the moral realm has become more important than truths and absolutes. Philosopher William Lane Craig says:

To assert that 'the truth is that there is no truth' is both self-refuting and arbitrary. For if this statement is true, it is not true, since there is no truth. So-called deconstructionism thus cannot be halted from deconstructing itself.

Moreover, there is also no reason for adopting the postmodern perspective rather than, say, the outlooks of Western capitalism, male chauvinism, white racism, and so forth, since post-modernism has no more truth to it than these perspectives. Caught in this self-defeating trap, some postmodernists have been forced to the same recourse as Buddhist mystics: denying that postmodernism is really a view or position at all. But then, once again,

why do they continue to write books and talk about it. They are obviously making some claims -- and if not, then they literally have nothing to say and no objection to [the rational] employment of the classical canons of logic (Craig, 1995:82).

In the postmodern cultural climate, the strong differentiation between moral thesis and antithesis are unacceptable. Take for example the controversy surrounding homosexuality, the ordination of [practicing] homosexuals, and same-sex marriage. The disestablishment of Christianity, coupled with postmodern relativism and pluralism, has made for a society in which personal choices are more important than truth -- following Rorty's contentions. So-called Christian truths are no longer widely accepted in 'free' Western societies. Even in many churches, biblical imperatives and dogmas are less important and acceptable than personal choice and tolerance. The biblical concept of 'love' has been elevated far above the biblical concept of 'truth.' Even Muslims cannot understand what is happening in Western societies. Again, M. A. Muqtedar Khan:

Suddenly perversion is an alternate lifestyle.
 God-consciousness for long understood as enlightenment is now bigotry and an indicator of social under-development. There is no absolute truth only contingent truths.
 Morality are conventions that work and justice is an option that enjoys political support. The self is no more the mystical domain where the spiritual and mundane merge. Life is no more the discovery and the perfection of that self.
 Today self is something you buy off a shelf (Khan, 2000).

Another epistemological and cultural trait of postmodernity is that there is little or no difference between the natural and artificial experience, between substantiated knowledge and unsubstantiated perceptions of reality and truth. This notion of 'de-realization' can be traced back to Kierkegaard, Marx, and Nietzsche. The abstract phantom, what Kierkegaard called 'the public,' is the creation of the press, which is the medium by and through which reality is created for the masses. Nietzsche later talks about the dissolution of the distinction between the 'real' and the 'apparent' world (Nietzsche, 1954:485), arguing that the real world has been done away with, leaving only something in between,

something akin to the virtual reality of contemporary [high-tech] life. It is interesting that Nietzsche describes this modernist trait well before the computer age. Lyotard also acknowledges the impact of computer technologies, which have also affected, as he calls it, the language game. He insists, “there is a strict inter-linkage between the kind of language called science and the kind called ethics and politics” (Lyotard 1984:8). Science, as such, is closely interwoven with government and information, and therefore participates in this ‘apparent’ world.

As if Western societies were not materialistic enough already, postmodernism engenders and encourages an even deeper level of superficiality. “Image is everything,” and facades are encouraged. Life becomes a collage of inner fragmented experiences that mean little. Postmodern eclecticism embraces whatever the individual deems valuable. Fragmentation is perfectly acceptable, even if it means embracing only portions of concepts, making truth and morality artificial, or unreal. Magical realism, for example, is widely popular in the arts, where movies such as *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the *Harry Potter* series, and *Lord of the Rings* have been hugely popular in the West.

In this postmodern, relativistic, eclectic, fragmented and nearly meaningless world, there is little need for a religion, like Christianity that deals with sin, because good and evil no longer exist. Sin is based upon [so-called] Christian truth, but is not the truth all people accept. Therefore, in ‘politically correct’ postmodern culture, there is only worse and better, and the relativists are not even sure of these. This truth relativism has deeply impacted the church, especially historic, mainline Protestantism, which still today is ensnared in synthesis, compromise, and accommodation, having lost its grip on the need for antithesis, truth and dogma, which are critical to the very existence of the church. As Francis Schaeffer argued so passionately: “Christianity demands antithesis, not as some abstract concept of truth, but in the fact that God exists, and in personal justification” (Schaeffer, 1990:47).

As with all relativism, postmodern claims are self-defeating, self-contradictory and logically inconsistent. D.A. Carson said if “there is no objective truth that binds all cultures together and evaluates them, then epistemologically, there is only truth for the individual, or for the individual culture, or for the diverse interpreting communities found

within each culture” (Carson, 1996:541). Even more disconcerting, Carson further suggests that the postmodern climate will not decline until a successor has replaced it. To date, several candidates are vying for the position, but none has yet risen to the challenge. One alternative promoted by some Christians is Critical Realism, which:

Accepts that there is an objective real world out there (physical and historical) which we can know, but it insists that we need to be constantly critical of our own capacity to know it with any finality or completeness. All our knowing is embedded in culture, history, community, but that does not invalidate it. We may never be able to know fully or perfectly, but that does not mean we cannot know anything. So we need to be humble (shedding Enlightenment arrogance) but not despairing (Wright, in Taylor, 2000:74).

Michel Foucault

Michel Foucault represents the postmodernists as well as any, and to my mind, bears special consideration. Foucault is a true product of post-WWII, postcolonial European culture. Foucault (15 October 1926 - 26 June 1984) was a French born philosopher, who came to hold a chair at the *College de France*, to which he gave the title *The History of Systems of Thought*. His writings are influential, multi-disciplinary and often described as postmodernist, or post-structuralist. He was critical of social institutions, especially psychiatry, medicine and prisons. He opposed social constructs that implied an identity, such as homosexual, criminal, and the like. His work often purposed to refute the modernist position that rationality was the sole means to truth, and the foundation for validating ethical systems.

During the 1960's, Foucault was more often associated with the structuralist movement. He did not like being identified as a postmodernist, saying he preferred to discuss the definition of modernity. Structuralism and post-structuralism are terms frequently used in relation to postmodernism, and several of the postmodernists developed from this stream of thinking. Structuralism is sometimes described as the attempt to bring all our attempts to understand human existence under one model, or structure, especially as influenced by the linguistics of Swiss theorist, Ferdinand de Saussure. Jacques Derrida, another key postmodernist, was poststructuralist, meaning he rejected Saussure's theories.

Foucault was born in Poitiers, France, as Paul-Michel Foucault. His father was an eminent surgeon who hoped his son would follow suit. They lived in the Vichy region of France, which later came under German occupation. After WWII, Michel gained entry to the prestigious *École Normale Supérieure d'Ulm*, a traditional path to an academic career. His life at the *École Normale* was difficult. He suffered from acute depression and even attempted suicide, for which he saw a psychiatrist. From this experience, he became fascinated with psychology. He later earned his licence in both philosophy and psychology. Like many alumnus from *École Normale*, he joined the French Communist Party (1950-53), but was never active. He later left the Communist party due to concerns about what was happening in the Soviet Union under Stalin.

Foucault lectured briefly at *École Normale* after passing his aggregation in 1950, and then taught psychology at the University of Lille from 1953-54. In 1954 he published his first book, *Maladie mentale et personnalité*, a work he would later disavow. He discovered he was not interested in teaching, so he left France in 1954, and served France as a cultural delegate at the University of Uppsala (Sweden). In 1958 he left Uppsala for briefly held positions in Warsaw, Poland and Hamburg, Germany, then returned to France in 1960 to complete his doctorate at the University of Clermont-Ferrand, which was awarded in 1961. There he met Daniel Defert, the man with whom he lived in a non-monogamous homosexual relationship for the rest of his life. In 1963, he published three works, including *Naissance de la Clinique (Birth of the Clinic)*.

Daniel Defert was sent to Tunisia for his military service, and Foucault followed, taking a position at the University of Tunis in 1965. In 1966, Foucault published *Les Mots et les choses (The Order of Things)*, during the height of his interest in structuralism, which intellectually grouped him with scholars like Jacques Lacan, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Roland Barthes, who purposed to discredit the existentialism made popular by Jean-Paul Sartre. By now, Foucault was anti-communist, but never fully distanced himself from elements of Marxist thinking. Foucault was still in Tunis during the student rebellions, which deeply affected him.

In the fall of 1968, he returned to France, taking a job at the new French experimental university at Vincennes, which opened that year (1968). Here, Foucault became the first head of the department of philosophy, beginning in December 1968. In 1969, he published *L'archéologie du savoir (The Archeology of Knowledge)*, a response to his critics. During his brief time at Vincennes, he joined students rebelling against police. In 1970, he was given a prestigious position at *Collège de France* as Professor of the History of Systems of Thought, and during this period of his life, his political activism decreased. Daniel Defert joined the ultra-Maoist *Gauche Proletarienne (GP)*, with whom Foucault loosely associated. Foucault helped found the *Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons*, or Prison Information Groups, which was a way for prisoners to voice their concerns. His work became markedly political thereafter (*cf., Surveiller et Punir -- Discipline and Punish*).

During the 1970's, many former Maoists changed their stance and began citing Foucault as a major influence in their thinking. Foucault left France to spend time in the United States at SUNY - Buffalo, where he had earlier lectured, and at U-California (Berkeley). In 1975, he took LSD at Zabriskie Point in Death Valley National Park, later calling it the best experience of his life. He enthusiastically participated in the gay community of San Francisco (California), and was particularly fond of S&M (sado-masochism). Here, he contracted HIV, eventually dying of an AIDS-related illness back home in Paris, France (1984).

People like Charles Taylor, Jürgen Habermas, Jacques Derrida, Nancy Fraser and Slavoj Žižek all criticized Foucault. While each focused on different specifics, all

generally agreed that his views were dangerously nihilistic, and not to be taken seriously. Historians frequently criticize Foucault for misrepresenting things, getting his facts wrong, or making them up entirely. Foucault attempted to defend himself against the critics of his historiographic methods, but never really succeeded. Perhaps his most notable critic was Jacques Derrida, whose extensive critique of Foucault's reading of Rene Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*, ended their friendship and marked the beginning of a fifteen year long feud between the two.

Key terms used by Foucault were: biopower and biopolitics, episteme (*épistémè*), genealogy, governmentality, *parrhesia* and power. *Parrhesia*, for instance, can mean 'free speech,' or 'to speak everything.' Foucault re-fashioned *parrhesia*, which he borrowed from the Greek, as a conceptual discourse in which one speaks openly and truthfully about their opinions and ideas without employing rhetoric, manipulation, or generalization. Foucault described the Ancient Greek concept of *parrhesia* as such:

More precisely, *parrhesia* is a verbal activity in which a speaker expresses his personal relationship to truth, and risks his life because he recognizes truth-telling as a duty to improve or help other people (as well as himself). In *parrhesia*, the speaker uses his freedom and chooses frankness instead of persuasion, truth instead of falsehood or silence, the risk of death instead of life and security, criticism instead of flattery, and moral duty instead of self-interest and moral apathy (Foucault, 1983).

Foucault is considered difficult to study, for his views changed over time. David Gauntlett says of this Foucauldian characteristic:

Of course, there's nothing wrong with Foucault changing his approach; in a 1982 interview, he remarked that "When people say, 'Well, you thought this a few years ago and now you say something else,' my answer is... [laughs] 'Well, do you think I have worked [hard] all those years to say the same thing and not to be changed?'" (Gauntlett, 2000: 131).

Foucault claimed he was not presenting a coherent and timeless block of knowledge. He makes statements that seem to contradict one another. “Part of the reason for this is that he is not attempting to present a theory of anything, a complete explanation of the structure of things. To attempt to do so, he says on one occasion, would be to concede the very position he is rejecting, since ‘theory still relates to the dynamic of bourgeois knowledge’” (Erickson, 2001:135). Foucault said of his own works:

I would like my books to be a kind of tool-box which others can rummage through to find a tool which they can use however they wish in their own area... I would like the little volume that I want to write on disciplinary systems to be useful to an educator, a warden, a magistrate, a conscientious objector. I don't write for an audience, I write for users, not readers (Foucault, 1974:523).

Foucault did not really focus on the deep, traditional questions that other philosophers and historians have often grappled with. Foucault was well schooled in history, but more focused on the contemporary. McHoul and Grace said of Foucault:

We do not believe that Foucault provides a definitive theory of anything in the sense of a set of unambiguous answers to time-worn questions. In this respect, there is little benefit to be gained from asking what, for example, is Foucault's theory of power? Nevertheless, his work clearly involves various types of theorisation. This is because we regard Foucault as first and foremost a philosopher who does philosophy as an interrogative practice rather than as a search for essentials (Grace, 1995:vii).

Foucault was once asked during an interview what people had especially influenced his thinking, to which he responded: Heidegger, Husserl, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and especially Nietzsche. He added:

Nietzsche was a revelation to me. I felt that this was someone quite different from what I had been taught. I read him with a great passion and broke with my life, left my job in the asylum, left France: I had the feeling I

had been trapped. Through Nietzsche, I had become a stranger to all that. I'm still not quite integrated within French social and intellectual life. If I were younger, I would have immigrated to the United States (Foucault, in Martin, 1988:9).

Foucault's rejection of modernism begins with his rejection of this Cartesian-Kantian beginning, preferring 'otherness' to 'sameness.' "The modern thinker assumes that the perceptions of the inquiring self provide accurate representations of an external world and hence a valid basis for knowledge of that world" (Grenz, 1996:127). According to Foucault, Western society has made a number of fundamental errors. He argues that scholars have wrongly believed, "(1) that an objective body of knowledge exists and is waiting to be discovered, (2) that they actually possess such knowledge and that it is neutral or value-free, and (3) that the pursuit of knowledge benefits all humankind rather than just a specific class" (*ibid.* 131). Foucault rejected the notion of a disinterested knower, or unbiased observer (a basic notion of science), thus rejecting the traditional construction of knowledge. Knowledge is, for him, a power struggle: not objectively discovered, but collectively constructed. Those with the greatest power establish knowledge and truth, therefore truth is a product of the process, and it establishes our reality. Of truth, Foucault said:

The important thing here, I believe, is that truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power: contrary to a myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who

are charged with saying what counts as true
(Foucault, 1980:131).

Foucault said his writings were a product of his life's experiences, and was well aware how critical they were of the institutional mainstream. His experiences within the mental health system had deeply affected him, as it has others. "I must confess I have had no direct links with prisons or prisoners, though I did work as a psychologist in a French prison. When I was in Tunisia, I saw people jailed for political expediency, and that influenced me" (Foucault, in Martin, 1988). It was apparently through these experiences that he came to question the use of power, especially when those who have the power, are sometimes little better than those they govern. For him, knowledge and power are intimately related.

Each of my works is a part of my own biography. For one or another reason I had the occasion to feel and live those things. To take a simple example, I used to work in a psychiatric hospital in the 1950s. After having studied philosophy, I wanted to see what madness was: I had been mad enough to study reason; I was reasonable enough to study madness. I was free to move from the patients to the attendants, for I had no precise role. It was the time of the blooming of neurosurgery, the beginning of psychopharmacology, the reign of the traditional institution. At first I accepted things as necessary, but then after three months (I am slow-minded!), I asked, 'What is the necessity of these things?' After three years I left the job and went to Sweden in great personal discomfort and started to write a history of these practices [*Madness and Civilization*]. *Madness and Civilization* was intended to be a first volume. I like to write first volumes, and I hate to write second ones. It was perceived as a psychiatricide, but it was a description from history. You know the difference between a real science and a pseudoscience? A real science recognizes and accepts its own history without feeling attacked. When you tell a psychiatrist his mental institution came from the lazar [leper] house, he becomes infuriated (Foucault, in Martin, 1988).

Foucault also seemed to delight in the marginalized. Once asked why he so often dealt with obscure personalities in his writings instead of mainstream thinkers, he replied:

I deal with obscure figures and processes for two reasons: The political and social processes by which the Western European societies were put in order are not very apparent, have been forgotten, or have become habitual. They are part of our most familiar landscape, and we don't perceive them anymore. But most of them once scandalized people. It is one of my targets to show people that a lot of things that are part of their landscape -- that people are universal -- are the result of some very precise historical changes. All my analyses are against the idea of universal necessities in human existence. They show the arbitrariness of institutions and show which space of freedom we can still enjoy and how many changes can still be made (Foucault, in Martin, 1988:9-15).

Foucault said many marginalized voices are not heard because the people who have power, also control access to information, communications and government. Totalitarian governments are an extreme example, as they suppress and repress those who otherwise might differ with government positions and policies. For Foucault, the “truth is that which is established by those who have the power to do so” (Erickson, 2002:47). The Ceausescu government of former Communist Romania is a classic example of government silencing its critics, and marginalizing those who differ with them. Those who object too loudly, are imprisoned, or killed. Governments have ways of justifying these practices, even in their own minds, sometimes using religion to legitimate their positions and actions, but surely, that does not make them right. Foucault further suggests that those who have power, in government, or religion, for instance, sometimes coercively set the boundaries of normative behaviour. Government officials may, or may not be right; but since they have power, they can establish laws and enforce them upon others. About his use of the word, governmentality, Foucault said:

I would now like to start looking at that dimension which I have called by that rather nasty word ‘governmentality.’ Let us suppose that ‘governing’ is not the same thing as

‘reigning,’ that it is not the same thing as ‘commanding’ or “making the law,” let us suppose that governing is not the same thing as being a sovereign, a suzerain, being lord, being judge, being a general, owner, master, professor. Let us suppose that there is a specificity to what it is to govern and we must now find out a little what type of power is covered by this notion (Foucault, 2004:119).

Foucault did not want to be limited by absolutes. Things that confine, define, govern, or restrict were offensive to him. “He analyses limits not as things needful and things to be adhered to, but as things fanciful and things to be transgressed” (Ganssle and Hinkson, in Carson, 2000:80). Foucault differentiates himself from Kant’s penchant for erecting structures and universal truths. What Kant considered the means to rescue humanity (*i.e.*, reason), Foucault viewed as chains that bind and limit. He simply could not abide any ‘absolutes;’ rather we “must turn away from all projects that claim to be global or radical... to give up hope of ever acceding a point of view that could give us access to any complete and definitive knowledge” (Foucault, in Carson, 2000:80). Foucault contended that truth is not simply something that exists independently of the knower, so that whoever discovers it is in possession of the truth. Rather, what one knows and believes to be true is a product of one’s historical and cultural situation (Erickson, 2002:42).

Certainly, individual perspectives on any given event can differ greatly. No two people witness a car crash, or criminal act, exactly alike. An African has a different perspective on a given event than a German, and so forth. These biases affect us all, and are a constant challenge. Richard Rorty called it the ‘mirror theory’ of reality, the concept that ideas simply reflect reality, especially according to one’s experiences.

For Foucault, truth is also derived from the closed universe, not from any metaphysical or supernatural source, such as ‘god.’ As Foucault puts it: “Truth isn’t outside power... truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint” (Foucault, 1984:72, in Carson, 2000:80). Foucault wants to free us from the constraints of traditions and metanarratives, to free the subject for “the ongoing enterprise of autonomous self-creation” (Ganssle and Hinkson, in Carson, 2000:81). Foucault does not

believe the conventions of modernity are unassailable, or unalterable. Of power and knowledge Foucault said:

Finally, there is a fourth characteristic of power -- a power that, in a sense, traverses and drives those other powers. I'm thinking of an epistemological power -- that is, a power to extract a knowledge from individuals and to extract a knowledge about those individuals -- who are subjected to observation and already controlled by those different powers. This occurs, then, in two different ways. In an institution like the factory, for example, the worker's labor and the worker's knowledge about his own labor, the technical improvements -- the little inventions and discoveries, the micro adaptations he's able to implement in the course of his labor -- are immediately recorded, thus extracted from his practice, accumulated by the power exercised over him through supervision. In this way, the worker's labor is gradually absorbed into a certain technical knowledge of production which will enable a strengthening of control. So we see how there forms a knowledge that's extracted from the individuals themselves and derived from their own behavior (Foucault, in Faubion, 2000:83).

Gene Veith argues that Foucault's notions are at times pro-Marxist, though Foucault never seemed interested in aligning himself with that worldview. In fact, Foucault was never fond of any tradition, established worldview, or institution. Foucault suggests that moral responsibility and individual freedom are merely grand illusions, "shaped by our own Western *bourgeois* culture" (Foucault, in Veith, 1994:76). Foucault even argues that liberty is an invention of the ruling classes (Foucault, 1984:78). For Foucault, oppression comes in many forms and thus, "oppression is intrinsic to all social institutions and to the language that gives them utterance. Individual identity must therefore be deconstructed" (Foucault, in Veith, 1994:77).

Foucault, like Rorty, wanted to change the rules of the game, so to speak -- to upset the traditions of modernity. Foucault is not trying to create his own 'grand theory,' only to

dislodge others. This kind of emancipation -- going from the frying pan into the fire, as it were -- is not a solution, however, it is merely change. Foucault described his [later] thinking during an interview at University of Vermont, on October 25th, 1982:

You said before that you have the feeling that I am unpredictable. That's true. But I sometimes appear to myself much too systematic and rigid. What I have studied are the three traditional problems: (1) What are the relations we have to truth through scientific knowledge, to those "truth games" which are so important in civilization and in which we are both subject and objects? (2) What are the relationships we have to others through those strange strategies and power relationships? And (3) what are the relationships between truth, power, and self? I would like to finish with a question: What could be more classic than these questions and more systematic than the evolution through questions one, two, and three and back to the first? I am just at this point (Foucault, in Martin, 1988).

Will 'Po-Mod' Endure?

Ernst Gellner (1925-95), whose credentials are extensive and impressive, had the ear of world leaders for many years, and his opinions are highly respected. Regarding the future of postmodernity Gellner concluded: "Postmodernism as such doesn't matter too much. It is a fad which owes its appeal to its seeming novelty and genuine obscurity, and it will pass soon enough, as such fashions do" (Gellner, 1992:71). To Gellner, postmodernity was the currently fashionable form of [philosophical] relativism, something actually practiced by only a handful of academics. Yet, Gellner expected that while postmodernism will pass as other philosophical fads have, the relativism and pluralism it endorsed will largely remain. Gellner's views accord with the growing backlash from others toward postmodernism. As already mentioned, modernity continues unabated in the West and beyond. Gellner believed, "the more securely a society is in possession of the new knowledge [modernity], the more totally it is committed to its use and is pervaded by it, the more it is liable to produce thinkers who turn and bite the hand which feeds them" (Gellner, 1992:79) -- as the postmoderns have done.

Gellner, like many others, believed the scepticism and criticism the postmoderns bring, is no kind of foundation upon which to build one's worldview. Gellner added that the cognitive ethic of the Enlightenment requires "the break-up of data into their constituent parts, and their impartial confrontation with any candidate explanatory theories" (Gellner, 1992:84). As such, the Age of Reason shares with the monotheisms the belief in the existence of unique truth -- not endless pluralisms and relativisms. Gellner was personally convinced there is only "one genuinely valid system of knowledge, and that, in very rough outline, the mainstream of Western epistemological tradition, currently so fashionable, has captured it" (*ibid.* 85). Steven D. Schafersman, of the University of Texas, Department of Philosophy, adds this insight:

Present-day philosophers of science are attempting to forge a new, third-generation, synthetic philosophy of science based on the best attributes of the previous two schools [positivism and empiricism]; this new school

is called, remarkably enough, the naturalist school. This turn or return to naturalism is now dominant among philosophers of science (Kitcher, 1992; Callebaut, 1993). These philosophers believe that matters of fact are as relevant to philosophical theory as they are to science (a positivist stance), but they also claim that the history of scientific discovery and theory formation is vital to understanding and explaining the workings of science (an historicist stance). I think the naturalist school is a very positive development in the history of philosophy of science, although I point out that they come to no agreements concerning the objectivity and credibility of science. Their work is still in progress The surest sign that postmodernism is wrong is that postmodern critiques of science have had absolutely no effect on the practice of science or the continuing achievements of science. If there had been any truth at all to postmodernism, scientists would have changed their scientific methods and procedures to try to escape the postmodern pitfalls of relativism, subjectivism, and externalism. The fact that few scientists know or care about postmodernism, and none have been influenced by it, speaks volumes (Schafersman, 1997).

Does postmodernism make any positive contributions? Prof. D.A. Carson believes there is “a large measure of truth in postmodernity” (Carson, 1996:91), because it does criticize the godless assumptions of modernity. Postmodernity does help to swing the pendulum the other direction from extreme rationalism and the “unnecessary dogmatism and legalism of a previous generation” (*ibid.* 91). Carson argues we have been ‘canonizing’ our own assumptions far too long. In this, postmodernism “is proving rather successful at undermining the extraordinary hubris of modernism” and concludes, “no thoughtful Christian can be sad about that” (*ibid.* 10). Carson adds, “not all of God’s truth is vouchsafed to one particular interpretive community” (*ibid.* 552).

World-class philosopher, William Lane Craig, said the biggest problem with postmodernism is not that it is unliveable, “but rather that it is so obviously self-

referentially incoherent. That is to say, if it is true, then it is false. Thus, one need not say a word or raise an objection to refute it; it is quite literally self-refuting” (Craig, in Cowan, 2000:182). Postmodernism is an “attempt to cut the feet from under one’s opponents without having to engage one’s opponents’ arguments, a strategy that is ultimately self-refuting” (*ibid.* 183). Craig is convinced that postmodernism is incoherent and faddish. Simply put, postmodernism commits epistemological suicide.

Ironically, Foucault, Derrida, and other French postmodernist thinkers have been *passé* in France for a good while, substituted by a generation of younger scholars called ‘neo-conservative.’ Moreover, if one takes the postmodern idea of the hermeneutics of suspicion seriously, then there is every reason to believe that their entire academic exercise is simply a thinly veiled disguise to get political power over anyone who holds a view different from their own. When postmodernists give up the idea of objective truth there is no reason whatsoever to take what they say as true -- particularly since they have conceded up front that nothing is genuinely true (Erickson, 2004:308).

Chapter III

Post-Modern and Post-Colonial

I am ever more convinced that there is a close relationship between postcolonialism and postmodernity, though by definition the two are dissimilar. Because postmodernity is a philosophical and cultural movement rooted in frustration with modernity, it is therefore also deeply frustrated with the Western agenda to dominate the world *via* colonialism. The overall failures of colonialism add to both the postmodern and postcolonial frustration with the Western modernist agenda, rooted as it always was in a sense of cultural superiority. Akin to Foucault's interest in power relationships, postcolonialists focus on inferiority and difference, especially the inequalities between rulers and ruled. Prof. Terry DeHay, from Southern Oregon University, said of this:

Postcolonialism, like other post-isms, does not signal a closing off of that which it contains (colonialism), or even a rejection (which would not be possible in any case), but rather an opening of a field of inquiry and understanding following a period of relative closure. Colonialism is an event which can be identified, given an historical definition, through its effects and characteristics as they reveal themselves in a given nation, among different cultural and social groupings (DeHay).

Postcolonialism, as such, developed following the collapse of European Colonialism. Many historians say the period ended c.1947 with India's independence, but others say the end did not come until as late as 1990, with the collapse of the Soviet Union. For this reason, I believe there have been two major contractions of colonialism in the modern historical era.

Postcolonial thinking has been present in Western scholarship since the 1980's, which accords with the first significant wave of the postmodern cultural impact, and just prior to

the second postmodern wave, which corresponds with the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is crucial to understand that there is an intricate and real relationship between colonialism, the Cold War, and the rise of the postmodern climate in the West -- which are extremely complex dynamics that will no doubt be better understood *via* future historical consideration. Anti-modernist and postcolonial cultural reactions have also deeply affected former Soviet nations. B.S. Turner suggests that the fall of Communism directly coincides with the rise of postmodernism: "These two changes, are without doubt closely interconnected in cultural and social terms" (Turner, 1994:11). Turner adds that "the consequence has been that there is no significant political or economic alternative to organized socialism as the antagonist of Western Capitalism, but it may be that this gap in the world system will be filled by either Islam or postmodernism" (Turner, 1994:11).

From the end of WWII (1945) to the collapse of the Soviet Union (c.1990), the Cold War dominated the world scene, involving the Western nations on one side, and on the other, those nations that had to varying degrees embraced the Communist manifesto (*e.g.*, China, Viet Nam). When the Cold War ended, so did the Soviet grip on buffer nations, which had been incorporated into the Soviet bloc following WWII. In the vacuum that followed the end of the Cold War, many changes transpired, but two of particular interest to our discussion: (1) postmodern uncertainties peaked in the West; and (2), global tensions have shifted, almost predictably, to those between the Islamic world and the former major players in the Cold War. The obvious reason for these tensions centre around Middle Eastern crude oil, which has been in high demand since WWII. Islamic nations (Saudi Arabia, Iran, *etc.*) control most of the world's oil reserves, while the largest consumers are all former Cold War combatants (China, Russia, US, Germany, *etc.*). The historic relationship between these major civilizations has often been tense, yet the demand for limited world oil supplies grows as supplies [naturally] diminish, making one wonder how much more volatile global relations will be in coming years.

The Cold War period produced two distinct postmodern cultural waves. The first wave was rooted in frustration with the two world wars and the limited regional conflicts of the Cold War (*i.e.*, Korea, Viet Nam). The second wave directly concerned the threat of global nuclear war, which was all too real during the Cold War. Recently declassified

accounts of the period, coming from both US and Russian sources, reveal that global thermonuclear war nearly happened three, or four times; the Cuban Missile Crisis being the most well know.

Current world tensions and realities are inseparable from historic colonial, and neo-colonial relationships. Nationalist movements have been vigorous, especially for nations formerly of the major Cold War power blocs. These nationalist movements are in some cases inseparable from religious adherence and the religio-cultural worldview that dominates many regions of the world. Islamic nations, for example, are rooted in a worldview that does not legally, or culturally separate religion from government as is commonly done in the West. These and so many other differences contribute to the diverse, dynamic and often tense world we live in today.

Postcolonialism *per se*, is quite similar to postmodernism, yet remains substantively different. Postcolonialism is a mood particularly expressed as a literary movement, much as postmodernism is expressed *via* postmodern deconstructionism. “Postcolonial studies emerged as a way of engaging with the textual, historical, and cultural articulations of societies, disturbed and transformed by the historical reality of colonial presence” (Sugirtharajah, 2002:11). Both postmodernism and postcolonialism are formally textual practices, yet each has a broader cultural impact. Their respective interests also differ geographically. Postcolonial writers attempt to unmask European authority, while postmodern writers attempt to unmask authority in general. Postcolonialism as a literary form seeks to “highlight and scrutinize the ideologies these texts embody and that are entrenched in them as they related to the fact of colonialism” (Sugirtharajah, 2002:79). Postmodernism turns out to be an ally of postcolonialism in that those who are seeking to come to terms with the experience of colonization and its long-term effects see in postmodernism not only the possibility of an alternative discourse that affirms and celebrates otherness, but also a strategy for the “deconstruction of the concept, the authority, and assumed primacy of the category of ‘the West’” (Young, 1990:19).

Like Foucault, postcolonialists are interested in the way language and power work together. The relationship between literature (and media generally) and power remains a vehicle for controlling, and/or manipulating, public and private language, thought and

action. During the colonial period, it was assumed: “the key to power is knowledge, and true power is held with the conviction that the ruler knows better than the ruled, and must convince the ruled that whatever the colonial master does is for the benefit of the ruled” (Sugirtharajah, 2002:15).

While the postmodern movement is frustrated with modernity, post-colonialism focuses its energies on deconstructing the former hegemony of the colonizers, which was done as much through literature and education, as through physical force. The colonizers intentionally worked to place themselves at the centre of the world, which accorded with the overall Western sense of cultural superiority at the time. Prior to the Enlightenment, colonization was practiced by Westerners (*e.g.*, Portugal, Spain) as a means of extending the Kingdom of God on earth. Following the Enlightenment, however, the practice became an extension of [supposed] Western cultural superiority. Colonization in general, of course, has routinely practiced political and economic subjugation of other nations and peoples, which required an on-going program of cultural conditioning to support and maintain the hegemony. Ngugi wa Thiong’o states in *The Cultural Factor in the Neo-colonial Era*:

Economic and political control inevitably leads to cultural dominance and this in turn deepens that control. The maintenance, management, manipulation, and mobilization of the entire system of education, language and language use, literature, religion, the media, have always ensured for the oppressor nation power over the transmission of a certain ideology, set of values, outlook, attitudes, feelings, *etc.*, and hence power over the whole area of consciousness. This in turn leads to the control of the individual and collective self-image of the dominated nation and classes as well as their image of the dominated nations and classes (Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, 1989).

Many contend that former colonial powers continue to extend their influence over other nations, both overtly and tacitly. Indeed, the whole ‘neo-colonialism’ issue is still hotly debated, with good reason. Some postcolonial literature is an attempt to alert others of the manner in which they are still being manipulated by the former colonial powers.

This resistance literature is quite popular, and remains focused on ‘de-centering’ the colonial cultural hegemony. “Besides postmodernism, postcolonial studies have been rapidly gaining attention as notoriously argumentative critical categories of our time” (Sugirtharajah, 2002:1). Like postmodernism, postcolonialism has drawn attention to minority and subjugated voices “which have been lost, overlooked, or suppressed in histories and narratives” (*ibid.*).

Interestingly, it was Edward Said, author of *Orientalism*, that in the 1970’s introduced the world to postmodernist Michel Foucault (Turner, 1994:4). Turner says of Foucault and Said: “The analysis of knowledge and power in the work of Michel Foucault provides the basis for Edward Said’s influential study of Orientalism (1978) as a discourse of difference in which the apparently neutral Occident - Orient contrast is an expression of power relationships” (Turner, 1994:21). Said’s Orientalism sought to “reduce the endless complexity of the East into a definite order of types, characters, and constitution” (*ibid.*).

The deep influence of modernity in Western theologizing, has consequently influenced global theologizing; considered by some, yet another form of neo-colonialism. Western cultural domination is also present in biblical translations. T. Johnson Chakkuvarackal, who teaches the New Testament at Serampore College in India, says postcolonial trends remain a challenge to biblical interpretation.

Most of the Indian translations are distorted due to the total dependence on the English versions, which provide messages different from the original sources. Thus there happens double and even more alienation from the original text. The different principles, colonial infiltration of English culture and language have created the tendency for Indians to rely on English versions as the primary sources. In the postcolonial period the Biblical message was corrupted extensively due to the strategies of decolonization of English language. and the attempts to make intertextuality between different religious traditions and scriptures. In such a context, this paper enables the translators, interpreters and the general public to give primary emphasis for the reliable Greek and Hebrew sources for translation and

interpretation. It again gives suggestions for every translator to use appropriate principles and methods to bring the message closer to the original (Chakkuvarackal, 2002).

Many non-Western theological contributions have made fresh and incredibly valuable contributions. For instance, the global Christian community has been able to see again through the eyes of the early church. Believers in regions where the church is young (*e.g.*, China) theologize with fresh and profound insights. Sub-Saharan African Christians are also producing extremely valuable contributions that often deal with life issues almost totally unknown to most Westerners (*i.e.*, monogamy). To be sure, African, South American and Asian Christians understand the particular and daily agonies of poverty that Westerners know so little of, and are able to theologize according to those experiences.

Along with this fresh theologizing have come syncretistic and even heretical beliefs; reminding the global church of the same growth pains the early church went through. The concern Westerners have for syncretism is, however, not equally shared by their non-Western brethren. “Third World biblical hermeneutics is still in the grip of the warning of missionaries against syncretism, overtly Christocentric in its outlook and reluctant to let go its Christian moorings” (Sugirtharajah, 2002:191). Further, Western biblical hermeneutics are “still seduced by the modernistic notion of using the rational as the key to open up texts and fails to accept intuition, sentiment, and emotion as a way into the text... By and large, the world of contemporary biblical interpretation is detached from the problems of the contemporary world and has become ineffectual because it has failed to challenge the status *quo* or work for any sort of social change” (Sugirtharajah, 2002:26).

Chapter IV

Postmodern Pluralism

A major aspect of postmodernity is the pluralism it endorses, and which will likely be the single most lasting effect of the already passing postmodern cultural wave. Postmodernism promotes 'truth' that is elusive, polymorphous, inward and highly subjective. As far as postmodernism is capable of clarity, it favours relativism and pluralism, and is hostile to concepts rooted in uniqueness, exclusivity, objectivity, and transcendent truth. Christians in the West are often confused and threatened by religious pluralism, because they have long considered themselves the dominant religious group: but no more, for pluralism has become a requisite social quality.

Postmodernism lacks a single organising principle and exemplifies the innate multiplicities of pluralism. Postmodern pluralism wages war with totalities, and any hegemony of a singular, unified perspective. It encourages liberation from order and stability, preferring instead nihilism and chaos. Postmodern pluralism brings the margins to the centre and pushes the centre to the margins. What was once 'mainstream' becomes antiquated, irrelevant and intolerant. Orthodoxy is considered the puppet of the powerful and the expression of great intolerance for the marginalised. Postmodern pluralists argue that true freedom is available in the non-traditional and de-centralised. To be singular in culture and religion is simply wrong. Only the multi-dimensional and plural is good, for there are only choices, not right and wrong.

Academia under modernity focused on the search for ultimate corresponding truths, while some streams of academia under postmodernity are obsessed with deconstruction, unreality, plurality, and political correctness. So-called modern religion was centred in dogma and antithesis; but postmodern pluralistic religion claims sin does not matter, that all paths lead to God, for love is all that matters, and truth matters not.

There are three basic forms of (religious) pluralism that most challenge the Christian faith in our day. The (1) hermeneutical, which challenges Scriptural mandates and the authority of the Bible; the (2) religious, which challenges the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, especially His critical role as Saviour; and (3) the ethical, which challenges the socio-cultural impact the faith has had where it has culturally indigenized. Pluralism certainly exists apart from postmodernism, but postmodernism does not exist without pluralism -- so it is only prudent that we now give serious consideration to postmodern pluralism, its causes, impacts and implications.

Population Dynamics and Pluralism

Changing population dynamics have contributed to the rise and spread of postmodern pluralism in the West. These dynamics impact local cultures, encouraging the proliferation of various pluralisms, and bringing new inter-personal stresses that frequently lead to misunderstanding, fear, and even conflict. Interestingly, the ongoing influx of new immigrants has in some ways intensified the Western frustration with modernity *and* given rise to greater cultural pluralisms.

Immigrants are commonly drawn to Western nations by the higher standard of living, though they may or may not approve of the Western worldview and life-style. Immigrants bring with them diverse cultural practices and unfamiliar worldviews. In the process of acculturation, new immigrants create changes for themselves and others, but also promote inter-cultural exchange and interaction.

Receiving nations can either welcome immigrants into the existing culture, or resist them; creating and maintaining isolationist pockets that slow the assimilation process and promote tensions between divergent groups. Maintaining segregated population sectors weakens national unity and often the willingness and ability of that nation to grow economically, and to defend itself from outside aggressors. To be a relatively healthy and

functional multi-dimensional society, the nation can become legally pluralistic, where personal freedoms are protected, and a social balance between those freedoms and social order is found and maintained.

To be a legally pluralistic society obliges people of sometimes-great diversity to work and live together: something easier said than done. Some of the most basic tools for social unity that have been successfully employed historically are common language and currency. Another major social unifier, albeit situational and periodic, is a common trial, or threat, which makes people willing to set aside lesser differences to confront the larger challenge before them.

If a pluralist society is to succeed, freedom of religion can, and should exist. The separation of state and religion is good, so that no religion is given favour over others, for a favoured religion -- no matter how well intentioned -- will eventually want to dominate the cultural and political landscape, even as Christianity did in Western Europe for so many centuries. While true that national endorsement of one religion can in some ways unify a population, it can also lead to fewer personal freedoms in the name of religious fidelity. The Central Asian Taliban regime is a recent example of how one religion is forced upon an entire society, literally enslaving people without choice.

No matter what path to social order is taken, religion is important to people all over the world and the relationship between government and religion is crucial to national health. As Bevens notes: "Culture and religion are intimately inter related, and in many societies they express themselves through each other, conditioning each other" (Bevens, 1999:30). In free, multi-cultural societies, the wealth of divergent cultures should be embraced and appreciated; yet knowing that hostility's will exist. While it may not please the majority religious group, the government needs to protect the religious freedoms of its citizenry. Some religions require, and/or imply a close relationship with the state, but when put into practice, religious freedom is seldom practiced.

Immigrant populations are typically poor, and often strain local economies. These new immigrants also bring fresh life into what are otherwise, commonly stagnant local and national cultures. The US and Canada, for example, are culturally rich and vibrant because of the diverse humanity God has gathered together -- but even once vibrant and

diverse immigrant populations become culturally stagnant over time without a fresh infusion from outside. Divergent cultures and worldviews can interact in the marketplace of ideas, and all can benefit. Tensions sometimes exist and disruptions do occur; but learning to live together, respecting the rights and views of others, is an important part of becoming a healthy, mature society. Intolerance, expressed violently is unproductive, and damaging -- typically rooted in fear, ignorance, and an unwillingness to allow others to think differently (*e.g.*, cultural and ideological conformity). One need not embrace all worldviews and cultures as their own, but mutual respect for divergent views can encourage peaceful exchange and growth for both.

Scripture informs us that all ethnicities are God-given, another dimension of the great diversity and blessing God has instilled within all of creation. Cultures, as such, are a different matter, however. Culture is a composite of the way people do things, the language they speak, the religion they practice. Because mankind's inherent corruption (*cf.*, Gen. 3), not all cultural expressions are pleasing to God, a truth the Christian needs to remember, especially where pluralism is concerned. This caution is especially crucial when dealing with the postmodern pluralist, who places little value in any truth taken from Scripture. The Lausanne Covenant expresses this warning well:

Culture must always be tested and judged by Scripture. Because man is God's creature, some of his culture is rich in beauty and goodness. Because he is fallen, all of it is tainted with sin and some of it is demonic. The gospel does not presuppose the superiority of any culture to another, but evaluates all cultures according to its own criteria of truth and righteousness, and insists on moral absolutes in every culture (Lausanne Covenant, Section 10).

Absent Moral Foundations

To be sure, pluralism exists in various forms around the globe, and for most has no connection whatsoever with postmodernity. Still, what affects the wealthy West does affect the rest of the world in a variety of ways, not least of which is economic. Contemporary Western nations are to no small degree a product of forces long at work undermining Judeo-Christian foundations. For decades, the transcendent authority of the Bible has been attacked and steadily undermined by both the modernists and the postmodernists, leaving Western societies with no accepted basis for morality. Even the laws that have been the foundations for Western societies have changed to accommodate cultural trends, as is the developmental nature of jurisprudence over time. Newbigin frequently suggests that the plausibility structures, or accepted norms of Western society, remained rooted in a Judeo-Christian morality until about the 1960's, when significant cultural changes began re-shaping cultures and governments.

Modernity rejected transcendent authority but tried to preserve some universal moral criteria. Postmodernity rejects both transcendent authority *and* the possibility or even desirability of universal moral grounds. So, no ethical stance can be deemed final and universal on the basis of any allegedly scientific description of the human being. Historical and cultural relativism pervades human ethics as much as human religion (Wright, in Taylor, 2000:94).

The ethical 'toothless-ness' promoted by the postmodernists can [potentially] lead to a nihilistic breakdown in societal order, leading to outright civil unrest and disorder. The creation of such a moral vacuum can open the door for Totalitarian governments that promise to restore civil and moral order, but seldom deliver the way people had hoped. Germany after WWI is a classic example of what can happen in such a socio-political vacuum. The financial distress Germany experienced following the war led also to moral breakdown, with growing social unrest and violence, making possible the rise of Hitler and the Nazi party. In this moral vacuum, the Nazi's manipulated nearly the entire,

desperate population to believe that they alone held the answers for Germany's future. Who at the time could have imagined the insanity that lie ahead for Germany and much of the world? Such is the potential for society's that loose their moral compass.

While I appreciate postmodernist Richard Rorty's call for relativistic personal freedoms, I cannot agree with his anti-foundationalist sentiments, which reflect the nihilistic bent of Nietzsche, and take the entire matter of personal freedoms to extremes -- something typical of the postmodernists. Rorty believes that what holds a society together is not a shared ideology, or philosophical commitment, but "a consensus that the point of social organization is to let everybody have a chance at self-creation to the best of his or her abilities, and that that goal requires, besides peace and wealth, the standard 'bourgeois freedoms'" (Rorty, 1989:84).

What Rorty and so many others refuse to accept is that while these individual and social freedoms *are* of great worth and *are* to be highly valued, they are neither attained, nor kept through the moral weakness that pluralism produces. Europe, for example, has learned these lessons through centuries of bitter experience. Because humanity *is* innately corrupt -- not innately good as so many choose to believe -- there must be order before there can be true freedom. Yet, order must be balanced with personal liberties. Throughout history, men and nations have wrestled with this great tension, and honestly few governments have been able to make it work for any length of time. Even in our own day, it is all too often true that those with the most and best weapons make the rules by which others live.

In arguing that we must simply rejoice in plurality without ever allowing the possibility that some truth claims may prove to have intrinsic or universal validity, postmoderns allow the warning of Michael Foucault to become reality: The verdict on differing truth claims will be decided not only any mutually reached judgments (since they are impossible) but on the basis of who has the economic or military power... The criteria will be determined... by those who have the dollars for the guns (Knitter, 1992:114, in Taylor, 2000:96).

Many pluralists espouse a 'soterio-centric' concern for global humanity (Knitter, in Taylor, 2000:96). This supposes that the world's major religions can come together to produce a moral - ethical foundation upon which societies can be guided. I believe this is a barren expectation, for the world's major religions have proven just the opposite throughout history. Nothing has, or is likely to change to make this a reality. The past one hundred years have been a time of great conflict on earth, much of it rooted in inter-religious conflict.

The obvious reason the major religions have been, and are unable to come to agreement, is that their tenets are fundamentally different. Further, true adherents, especially of the fundamentalist variety, are not about to surrender their beliefs, even to have so-called 'peace,' for even world peace can be a fiction. Even Jesus said: "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword" (Mat. 10:34). Jesus was, of course, not suggesting, or permitting violence as a means of advancing the Kingdom of God -- contrary to other religions -- but instead acknowledging the reality that the true disciple would not surrender faith in Christ even to have peace (*cf.*, Mat. 10). For the true disciple, even of some other religions, surrendering their faith to please the pluralists is tantamount to heresy, disobedience, and blasphemy.

To embrace one faith over another suggests minimally that one religion is better than another, according to some standard of comparison. Many people are born and raised in cultural environments in which they are conditioned to preference one religion, or another. To be a Turk, for example, is to be Muslim -- and so forth. The pluralist agenda to bring the world religions together somehow, working toward common goals and world peace is noble -- and God does bless the peacemakers (*cf.*, Mat. 5:9a) -- but naive.

Religion is very important to most people on earth, but just what is religion's proper place in society? What if religion could be so marginalised as to have little or no affect on society? What if religion could be replaced with humanistic sensibilities, for example, as the modernists have long wanted? Would the world be a better place? Would world peace then be attainable? The short answer is 'no' to all.

Lesslie Newbigin maintained that in Western cultures there has come to be a duality of public facts and private values, where all religions are relegated to the private realm --

but hardly in entirety. Keeping the church out of the public realm has long been a particular focus of the Enlightenment agenda. “There are loud voices that insist that the church has no business meddling with matters of politics and economics; that its business is with the eternal salvation of the human soul; and that if it undertakes to give ethical advice at all, it should be confined to advice about personal conduct” (Newbiggin, 1986:95).

David Bosch said the Enlightenment paradigm “expected that religion would eventually disappear as people discovered that facts were all they needed to survive, and that the world of values -- to which religion belongs -- would lose its grip on them” (Bosch, 1991:475). Even religionists began to embrace and/or surrender to the humanist advance, evidenced by the strong naturalism now so deeply ingrained in so many streams of Western Christianity today. While Secularism has not produced the a-religious, secular society the humanists had hoped, it has still profoundly impacted the faith communities, making some so impotent they are little more than social gatherings.

Rather than founding societies upon religious morals, humanists have long argued that non-religious philosophical constructs could adequately provide social foundations; but have they ever been able to deliver? David Bosch said the “great ideologies of the twentieth century -- Marxism, Capitalism, Fascism, and National Socialism -- were only made possible by Enlightenment scientism” (*ibid.* 359). Yet, over the years these godless constructs have proven themselves horribly inadequate. The grandest, most recent example of this is the failure of the Soviet Union. These bogus utopianisms, and/or religions, of so-called secular humanity, predictably fall short, for they simply do not have the ability to transcend the countless shortcomings, limited thinking, and moral incapacity of humanity. This is why men must turn to religions to raise them above the morass of their existence; but again, to which religion should mankind turn? This again brings people face-to-face with the moral and religious assertions of the pluralists, who argue that all roads lead to the same ‘god,’ and same ‘salvation.’ But do they?

Saved from what?

Contemporary Western societies remain deeply frustrated with modernity. Yet, people continue looking to science for moral guidance -- but find none. Partially Christianized ultra-modern societies are still influenced by their Judeo-Christian heritage and the remnant people who still publicly share their faith. People want and need moral-ethical guidance, but often do not know where to turn for it, especially since Christianity has officially been relegated to the margins of society, and morals are a private matter. Even worse, many, many churches in the West do not know what they stand for, who they are, or what they believe. It is little wonder society at large does not turn to the churches - especially the Liberal Protestants -- for moral guidance: they have none to offer.

Where are people to turn for moral guidance? Corruption in business and government are common, and ethical training is now commonplace for employees. People openly wonder: What is right and wrong? Why does it matter? Is there a God? What is the right religion? What is 'heaven' and how can I get to there?

Christian terminology, once so common, is now little understood in broader Western culture. When Christian evangelists query people today, "Are you saved?" the common response now is: "Saved from what?" The 'four spiritual laws' (*e.g.*, Campus Crusade for Christ) and various other evangelistic tools that various Christian ministries have used for decades are far less effective. The 'crusade evangelism' that had been popular in the West for decades is now dramatically less effective than it once was (*e.g.*, Billy Graham).

Many Christians would probably agree in the doctrine of Christ alone (*soli Christus*), which distinguishes Christianity from other religions. The contemporary postmodern, relativistic, and pluralistic culture, however, defends personal freedoms and choice. Claims to exclusivity are simply intolerant and unacceptable. Yet, in typical postmodern, eclectic fashion, people ask: what does it mean to be spiritual; what does God require of man; what response does God demand from us; how can I 'get right' with the Creator?

If those outside the Christian community seem confused about salvific matters, perhaps it is little wonder, since even Christians cannot seem to agree on matters of

salvation. Here again we see how God's own have conceded to the broader culture. Views about salvation are varied. Fundamentally, there is universalism and particularism. With universalism, all people are 'saved;' while with particularism, only those are saved who [somehow] partake of God's salvation. There are also the generally accepted divisions of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. The exclusivist believes that God's salvation is only appropriated *via* Christ's work and faith in Him alone (*soli fide*). The inclusivist believes in salvation *via* Christ, but that God has provided exceptions; and the pluralist believes God's salvation can be through Christ, or *via* any number of other spiritual paths.

Another contemporary debate among Christians involves the difference between accessibilism and restrictivism. In accessibilism, people can respond to God through general revelation (*cf.*, Rom. 1), and can be saved without special revelation (*cf.*, Rom. 10). In restrictivism, salvation is available only *via* special revelation (Rom. 10) and a faith response to Christ is required. The pluralist and the postmodern both argue that such matters must be left to the individual, that others cannot impose such judgments on others. Are individuals subject to what the larger group (*e.g.*, institutional church) decides, or are these matters entirely between the individual and God? There seems no end to these arguments.

Of course, religious pluralists believe there are many ways to be saved, or get to heaven, or please god -- depending upon one's personal views and goals. According to Lesslie Newbigin, religious pluralism is the "belief that differences between religions are not a matter of truth and falsehood, but of different perceptions of the one truth; that to speak of religious beliefs as true or false is inadmissible" (Newbigin, 1989:14). People like John Hick and Bishop Spong have argued for years that the exclusivity of Christ is utter foolishness and the teachings of Scripture are mere metaphor. They want to universalize religion and the particular claims each make. Love and peace are the ultimate goals, but in the process, truth claims are relegated to the garbage heap.

It doesn't make too much difference whether you are Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish, or for that matter, Hindu or Mohammedan. They are all different ways to the same goal. Basically they follow the same moral code and the

religious uplift is the same... Probably the religion of the future will succeed in incorporating the best insights of them all. Christian missionaries, therefore, should not impose their views on others but should rather sit at a round table and pool their views for the good of all. Confucius, Lao-tse, Asoka, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and then finally Jews! These are the great leaders of mankind (Heineken, 1957:131).

John Hick endorses ‘pluralist theo-centrism,’ a concept that does not put Christ or any other religious figure at the centre. Instead, he suggests that Christ, Allah, Brahman and others are merely planets orbiting the real *theos* (*i.e.*, god), who remains abstract to humanity. These names are really ‘masks’ by which “the divine reality is thought to be encountered by devotees of those religions... But none of them is ultimately true in the way their worshippers claim” (Chris Wright, in Taylor, 2000:87). Hick argues “we should no longer put Christ or the church at the centre of the religious universe, but only God” (Chris Wright, in Taylor, 2000:87). To John Hick, this generic ‘God’ is like the sun, orbited by many planets, metaphorically representing the different religious constructs. Hick believes all names for ‘god’ -- *Yahweh*, Jesus, Vishnu, Allah, Brahman, *etc.*, -- are variations on the same personage. Thus, what pluralism does to Christianity, it does to all religions, reducing them to meaningless claims, where none is any truer than others. Of the Jewish voice of God, Hick said, for example:

The concrete figure of *Jahweh* is thus not identical with the ultimate divine reality as it is in itself but is an authentic face or mask or *persona* of the Transcendent in relation to one particular human community... For precisely the same has to be said of the heavenly Father of Christianity, of the Allah of Islam, of Vishnu, or Shiva, and so on (Hick, 1992:130).

What is so incongruous and absurd about all this is that if one will only take the time to compare the major religious figures, profound differences quickly become apparent. Muhammad is called the prophetic successor of Jesus Christ, yet the tenure and focus of their lives were drastically different. Muhammad was a man who conquered territorially *via* military conquest, and forced his beliefs on others. Jesus, in contrast, healed the lame

and sick, conquered ignorance through his teachings, and established an unseen Kingdom built upon the foundations of love and truth. Even the most cursory comparison might show Ghandi closer to Jesus, than Muhammad. How can the pluralists claim these men are variations of the same thing? They claim they are simply different and fuller expressions of the greater totality that ‘god’ is. If true, what manner of ‘god’ do the pluralists suggest we follow? Should we follow a ‘god’ who is so personally inconsistent that he/she is violent and peaceful, truthful and a liar (*cf.*, various Eastern teachings)? The Apostle Paul said of such teachings: “the time will come when they [people in general] will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2Ti. 4:3-4).

Questions rooted in the philosophical ‘problem of evil’ also frequently attend salvific and pluralistic discussions. For example, ‘how can a good God allow people to go to hell,’ or ‘would not a loving and good God save all?’ Hick and others suggest, at least by implication, that God is somehow obligated to save those He has created. The Bible teaches clearly, however, that God is *not* obligated to save any (*cf.*, Deu. 8:18-20; 17; Psa. 49; Eze. 33). That He saves *any* is astonishing. Henry C. Thiessen said, “let us remember that election deals not with innocent creatures, but with sinful, guilty, vile, and condemned creatures. That any should be saved is a matter of pure grace” (Thiessen, 1994:264). *Yahweh* is not like the capricious and vindictive god’s of some other religions. He does not want to send people to hell. However, *Yahweh* is just and true, and man’s rebellion must be justly punished (*cf.*, Eze. 18:21-32; 33:11; 2Pe. 3:9; 1Ti. 2:4). The axiom -- ‘guns don’t kill, people do,’ is not far afield here. God does not capriciously send the undeserving to hell, a place of eternal separation from His glorious presence; people send themselves there because of their rebellion against a loving, just, good and true God.

For many, religious pluralism is nothing more than a way that allows and enables people to avoid difficult questions and decisions. The postmodern influence has further inculcated the Western mind with a relativism and scepticism that doubts nearly everything, including the potential for truth. All ‘gods’ are impersonalized. Religious

constructs and doctrines are allegorized, making all things ‘nothingness,’ or meaningless. So-called ‘higher powers’ become ‘gods’ that mankind can shape as suits his/her whims. In this *milieu* of nothingness, James W. Sire asks: “Why should anyone believe anything at all?” (Sire, in Carson, 2000:94).

All this ‘meaninglessness’ is similar to the higher stages of Hinduistic self-realization, where the lines between good and evil are completely blurred. At all levels of Hinduism, there is a works-righteousness emphasis. If you do well, you may be able to escape the endless cycle of *samsara*. For the higher castes, however, self-realization and the Brahmin oneness of all things means that good is evil and evil, good. There is no motivation to be moral, which is reflected in the highly immoral behaviour of the higher caste priests (Koukl, 1993). Where reality is only *Maya*, or illusion, where there is no motivation to do good, or even to attempt to differentiate one from the other, where nothing really matters -- man inevitably reverts back to pursuing his own self interests. From this sprout the carnal creeds: “do unto others, before they do unto you,” and “grab all you can in this life, because that’s all there is.” This is why postmoderns generally ‘get along’ so well with Eastern philosophies, which routinely blur lines and leave man the creator of moral constructs and his own world.

The Slippery Slope

Francis Schaeffer warned for decades of the growing postmodern pluralistic climate in the West. He argued, among other things, that without antithesis, truth would fall apart, as indeed it has -- especially regarding morality. Schaeffer noted how the embrace of the Hegelian dialectic of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, had done so much to undermine truth and absolutes. Schaeffer said “Christianity demands antithesis, not as some abstract concept of truth, but in the fact that God exists and in personal justification” (Schaeffer, 1990:47). If we embrace synthesis, not antithesis, we are left

with relativism, pluralism and no absolutes. There no longer remains good and evil, there is only something in-between that is neither. This compromise *ethos* is also at the heart of the Eastern religions, and to no small degree present in postmodern eclecticism. These and other pluralists take the middle ground between good and evil, embracing the lukewarmness Jesus specifically warned us of:

I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' -- and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked -- I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see (Rev. 3:15-18).

The concept of antithesis is as basic as creation itself. Consider for example, the God-established dichotomy between light and dark. "Then God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. And God saw the light, which it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day" (Gen. 1:3-5; *cf.*, 14-19). Another is this:

You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever

therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Mat. 5:13-19).

Jesus makes very clear that antithesis -- the separation of mutually contradictory things -- *is* God ordained. The sin-corruption that so pervades all of creation (*cf.*, Rom. 8:18-22) makes the difference between right and wrong 'grey,' or difficult to clearly and definitively distinguish. Sin-corrupted human beings are not fully able on their own to make such distinctions. This is why God provides His Law. The difference between right and wrong, good and bad, is not then according to man's already corrupt notions, but according to the sinless, incorrupt, transcendent, and perfect understanding of all things that God alone possesses. Apart from God, mankind is completely incapable of identifying the true disparity between right and wrong, good and evil, for mankind is too corrupt to know the difference. This is precisely why God's Laws are not bad, keeping us from having fun, as it were. Rather, knowing right and wrong makes the quality of our lives better, and our relationship with the Creator right and healthy.

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb (Psa. 19:7-10).

The pluralist prefers to embrace a non-committal middle ground that is not true nor false, right nor wrong, cold nor hot. It is neither pleasing, nor offensive. It produces neither passion, nor anger. It promotes instead, apathy and disinterest. It is reactive, not proactive: it simply exists -- stale, stagnant and lifeless. It is not pleasing to God, for He and His Kingdom are proactive, truth and mission driven. Religious pluralism is without question an unholy agenda meant to lull people -- especially God's own -- into moral lethargy. For the Christian the remedy for such a lacklustre faith is the fresh embrace of

our first love -- Jesus Christ (Rev. 2:4-5). Those who have fallen into apathy about God and His Word need to put Him back on the throne of their lives, to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Mat. 6:33). Only when our priorities are set in proper order, does life make any sense.

The present-day [postmodern] call for ‘tolerance’ and ‘political correctness’ is pervasive. Any kind of absolute faith commitment or firm doctrinal conviction is ridiculed. Those who embrace ‘totalizing concepts’ and metanarratives like the Bible are criticized as relics of bygone days. While it is ‘OK’ to embrace personal beliefs, it is quite another matter to proselytize. It is quite alright for the postmodern pluralist to demean those who embrace traditional, conservative views, but to criticize them in return is wholly unacceptable: a double standard to be sure.

Religious dogma is simply not welcome in today’s ultra modern cultural climate -- even in many churches, who have succumbed to the spirit of our age (*cf.*, 2Co. 4:1f; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 6:12). Lesslie Newbigin suggests that part “of the reason for the rejection of dogma is that it has for so long been entangled with coercion, with political power, and so with the denial of freedom -- freedom of thought and of conscience” (Newbigin, 1989:10). Mindless obedience to church dogma is not healthy for the individual, or for the church. Fideism in metaphysics means giving priority to faith over reason, but in contemporary usage has come to mean an irrational belief in things supernatural. What too often happens is that ‘faith’ becomes a rote human tradition that is blindly followed. A true, vibrant faith is one that has been intellectually considered and wrestled with, and then embraced. God has given us reasoning minds so that we can thoroughly consider the intellectual dimensions of the faith, especially in contrast to other religions and philosophical constructs.

Pluralists and postmodernists alike cannot endure the so-called intolerance of conservative, orthodox Christianity that stands upon the ancient, apostolic teachings. Such certainty and dogma are for them, unrealistic, unproven, and unworthy of humanity’s advance beyond mankind’s mythical and superstitious past. They prefer instead something far less certain. “Universalism is thus the *raison d’etre* for the response of openness to religious diversity thought to be required by postmodern thinkers.

Total openness and religious relativism spring from an abhorrence of Christian particularism” (Okholm, 1995:83).

Those who endorse religious pluralism also necessarily endorse religiosity that stands upon no absolutes, and no solid ground. Nevertheless, world religions *do* make different claims, and cannot all be true. By simple, logical necessity, all claims can be false, or some can be true and others false, but not all can be true. G.K. Chesterton said of pluralists: “Tolerance is a virtue of the man or person without convictions” (Chesterton, in Carson, 2000:331). The truth is, pluralism is rooted in fear. It means not having to make choices and take stands, to have personal convictions and to live them out before others. Pluralism is the easy way out -- the coward’s choice -- the way of the unconvicted, the spineless, and the apathetic.

In contemporary Western societies, one may be considered a fool to believe in the supernatural, but general talk about ‘god,’ prayer and the like are not likely to stir much commotion. Bring the name Jesus Christ into the mix, however, and the situation quickly changes, because there is no name more controversial and offensive than Jesus Christ (*cf.*, Rom. 9:33): the so-called ‘Jesus problem.’ While many, including Muslims, will broadly accept Jesus as a moral figure that may, or may not have actually lived, to cross the line into discussing Jesus’ own incredible claims stirs controversy.

The problem is, if Jesus actually lived, people must consider his claims, and most people truly do not want to face those questions. It is therefore much easier to take a relativistic and pluralistic stance. It is far easier to discount and ignore the possibility that Jesus existed historically, believing that he is but one of many ancient mythical figures that men still turn for moral guidance. Postmoderns truly do embrace and endorse a dream-scape reality, where right and wrong, good and bad do not matter. Right and wrong are personal choices and in the end, it does not seem to matter whether Jesus lived, or not. They care little about what their personal moral choices may mean for others, how their penchants may impact those around them. It is careless and selfish living. Postmoderns and pluralists twist truth and make history say what pleases them.

In spite of this, Jesus did make exclusive claims about himself; claims that others cannot accept (*cf.*, Mat. 11:6; Joh. 15). For example, Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth,

and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (Joh. 14:6; *cf.*, Mat. 28:18; Joh. 10:30; 14:9). The claims Jesus made about himself offended the (Jewish) religious leaders of His day, and have been offending people ever since. Christians ever since have defended their faith as a reality rooted in history, making Christian claims unique among all others. Only Christianity dares to step with both feet into public courtroom of history, to argue the veracity of Christ’s claims, bringing us to our next query: how should Christians respond to postmodernity?

Chapter V

A Christian Response to Postmoderns?

How can Christians respond to the relativistic, pluralistic and nihilistic penchants of the postmoderns? It should help to remember that Christianity has endured many challenges over the centuries, including other periods of intensive pluralism and relativism -- most notably the early church period under Rome, and the Caesar cults. The Apostle Paul's ministry was fully immersed in a pluralistic and relativistic social environment, where the church was challenged all around, but also prospered enormously. Indeed, Christianity outlived the once mighty Roman Empire.

Perhaps an old axiom is helpful here: one can accomplish more using a carrot, than a stick. Put another way, love accomplishes more than the anger of religious zealots and Pharisaical finger pointing. As David Bosch suggests: "We cannot possibly dialogue with or witness to people if we resent their presence or the views they hold" (Bosch, 1992:483).

The Christian response to all challenges must always be rooted in the love... but the truth of God can never be forsaken. This tension between love and truth seems an impossible balance at times, but we must strive to attain it, as the Spirit of God empowers His own to do so. The focus must always be on Jesus (*cf.*, 1Co. 1:23), not the brokenness and shortcomings of other people. "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:1-2). Our example, focus and hope, is Christ alone. Vision produces discipline, and the true disciple of Christ is so committed to Him that they are motivated to suffer and die, if necessary, to honour Him.

Those who truly know Jesus Christ are mandated and compelled to make Him known to others. Sharing the faith means witnessing, or telling others, about God's love and goodness -- not manipulating, or forcing others to believe as we do, because the gospel never gives the believer license to do so. "Persuasion becomes intolerant and arrogant when we use imposition and manipulation" (Fernando, in Carson, 2000:127). God wants His people to live at peace with their neighbours, but also never to compromise their faith, even if it means bringing ridicule, and/or troubles upon us (*cf.*, Mat. 10:34f). The balanced witness should also make others aware of God's inevitable judgment upon all flesh, for His nature is rooted in love *and* justice. This truth and tension keeps God's own alert, obedient and motivated, for the Father does chastise His children for their own good (*cf.*, Heb. 12:4f). It is vital that those yet distant from God, learn of the coming judgment, for many have come to faith in Christ as a result.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (2Pe. 3:10-13).

Sharing the love of God is imperative, and part of a holistic, incarnational witness. Yet, God's people cannot forsake sharing the truths He has revelationally provided (*cf.*, Jer. 28; 2Pe. 1:21), which inevitably leads to the exclusive claims of Christ Jesus, a very difficult thing for others to accept (*cf.*, Joh. 14:6). The "Christian faith cannot surrender the conviction that God, in sending Jesus Christ into our midst, has taken a definitive and eschatological course of action and is extending to human beings forgiveness, justification, and a new life of joy and servant-hood, which, in turn, calls for a human response in the form of conversion" (Bosch, 1991:488).

Religious pluralism challenges us to hold firmly to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as Savior even as we work for increased tolerance and understanding among religious communities. We cannot seek harmony by relativizing the truth claims of religions... We commit ourselves to reconciliation. We also commit ourselves to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in faithfulness and loving humility (*Iguassu Affirmation*, in Taylor, 2000:19).

Christians must further understand that pluralism *is* syncretism. Real syncretism is, as A. Oepke asserts, “always based on the presupposition that all positive religions are only reflections of a universal original religion and show therefore only gradual differences” (Oepke, in Anderson, 1984:17). Hooft defines syncretism as “the view which holds that there is no unique revelation in history, that there are many different ways to reach the divine reality, that all formulations of religious truth or experience are by their very nature inadequate expressions of that truth and that it is necessary to harmonise as much as possible all religious ideas and experiences so as to create one universal religion for mankind” (Hooft, in Anderson, 1984:17). Like John Hick, the Hindu mystic Ramakrishna, and others, pluralists claim that all paths lead to the same ‘god,’ or ultimate reality. Gandhi, for example, declared, “the soul of religions is one, but it is encased in a multitude of forms” (*ibid.* 18).

The Christian response to postmodernity cannot be a “myopic conservative retrenchment” (Middleton, 1995:173), for the faith has much to offer this rootless postmodern, pluralistic generation. D.A. Carson adds that we must acknowledge “certain truths in postmodernity, without getting snookered by the entire package” (Carson, 1996:136). A person’s hope should not rest in the promises of modernity, or any other human construct. Contrary to the anti-foundationalism and hopelessness that postmodernism endorses, people *do* need a *raison d’être*, or reason for being. People do want stability in their lives: they want something stable and sure to believe in: and who better to lead foundation-less people to, than the Rock (*cf.*, Psa. 18:2, 31, 46).

The modernists would not endorse the future hope provided *via* biblical eschatology, instead replacing what Scripture offered with various secular Utopianisms. Hope for the

future was no longer heaven, but a society of [supposedly] sharing, caring people who, it was believed, would work collectively to make life better for all. The grand experiment of Marxism seemed the ultimate answer, and for a time, even seemed to work; but was, like all other human-originated constructs, doomed to failure. In time, this Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9) fell too (c.1989). Men are seldom content to accept what God provides (*cf.*, Num. 11), preferring in their arrogance to live in rebellion against God, supposing in their grand foolishness that they know better how to live. “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Pro. 16:5). Lesslie Newbigin adds:

Once the real end of history has been disclosed, and once the invitation is given to live by it in the fellowship of a crucified and risen messiah, then the old static and cyclical patterns are broken and can never be restored. If Jesus is not acknowledged as the Christ, then other christs, other saviors will appear. But the gospel must first be preached to all the nations (Newbigin, 1989:122).

Stackhouse, with others, argues that religion is a necessary component of any society, without which the moral and ethical foundations will crumble. Stackhouse said religion is, or should be, “the moral heart of social history. It provides the inner logic by which the most important aspects of civilization operate, with theology as the science proper to its understanding. When religion is transformed, the society changes; when religion falls apart or dries up, not only do people suffer meaninglessness, but the civilization crumbles” (Stackhouse, 1988:82). Yet, again, which religion should be used as the moral foundation of a society?

Christian’s entrust their future to Jesus Christ, who alone is able to save us from our sin and ourselves, a faith rooted in the biblical revelation without additions (*cf.*, Mormonism). The faith is not founded upon the whims of mere humans, but that which was entrusted to us by Jesus Himself. Honest disciples of Christ know the gospel always comes with clay feet, not with any splendour we provide, but in the power of the Spirit. It is precisely as the Apostle Paul said long ago:

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe?
 Where is the disputer of this age? Has not
 God made foolish the wisdom of this world?
 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world
 through wisdom did not know God, it pleased
 God through the foolishness of the message
 preached to save those who believe. For Jews
 request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom;
 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a
 stumbling block and to the Greeks
 foolishness, but to those who are called, both
 Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God
 and the wisdom of God. Because the
 foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the
 weakness of God is stronger than men
 (1Co. 1:20-25).

How does the committed Christian respond to those who have doubts about the faith, Scripture, and Christ -- especially those influenced by postmodern doubts about everything? I would simply encourage a holistic, biblically balanced witness that combines good works with verbal testimony. There is great lasting value in manifesting the love of God, providing tangible expressions of love, especially to our 'enemies.' Such witnesses, combined with speaking God's truth(s) in love, are the critical ingredients of an effective, God-honouring witness. As Jesus said:

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'
 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect (Mat. 5:43-48).

An Apologetic Response?

Beyond the general Christian response to postmoderns, there also needs to be a focused apologetic response. Christian apologetics have long focused on meeting challenges to the faith presented by given circumstances, contexts, or ‘generations.’ The purpose of apologetics is not to bring people to faith -- that is the task of evangelism. Rather, the “apologist clears the bushes so the listener can take a good look at the cross, and it is the Holy Spirit who brings about the change in the heart of the individual” (Zacharias, in Carson, 2000:41). The apologetic response is biblically mandated, calling Christians to ‘defend’ the faith where and as necessary.

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil (1Pe. 3:15-17; *cf.*, Act. 22:1, 26:24; Phi. 1:7, 16; 2Ti. 4:16).

For years, Western apologists have responded to the particular challenges presented by the Enlightenment, and to my mind, must continue to do so indefinitely, because as already discussed, modernity lives on. British theologian T.A. Roberts adds: “the truth of Christianity is anchored in history; hence the implicit recognition that if some or all of the events upon which Christianity has traditionally thought to be based could be proved unhistorical, then the religious claims of Christianity would be seriously jeopardized” (Roberts, in Nash, 1998:9). Christians cannot surrender to *any* assault upon the faith -- especially opposition from anthropocentric humanists. Christian apologetics remains an essential component of our overall missiological witness, and must continue to be pursued with vigour and excellence.

Christianity alone -- of all the world’s religions -- is able and willing to respond philosophically and evidentially to its critics. All other religions evade the challenges of

the modernists, and especially the Higher Critics. “Many religious traditions typically float in a historical never-never land, immune from a threat that might follow from historical inaccuracies or, for that matter, the absence of any link to historical events in the world of space and time” (Nash, 1998:9). Christianity has for centuries attempted to meet its critics in the historical, here and now, battle for truth. Pre-eminent apologist, J.W. Montgomery, argues that a “nonfactual religion, of course, is not capable of factual defence; but Christianity, grounded in the fact of God’s entrance into human history in the person of Christ, is the factual and defensible religion *par excellence*” (Montgomery, 1978:30). Montgomery adds:

The church of the New Testament is not an esoteric, occult, Gnostic sect whose teachings are demonstrable only to initiates; it is the religion of the incarnate God, at whose death the veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom, opening holy truth to all who would seek it (Montgomery, 1978:38).

Christian philosopher, William Lane Craig, believes Christianity should not realign its witness to the world -- especially not in accordance with the present postmodern fad. “Such a realignment would be not only unnecessary, but counterproductive, for the abandonment of objective standards of truth and rationality could only undermine the Christian faith in the long run by making its call to repentance and faith in Christ but one more voice in the cacophony of subjectively satisfying but subjectively vacuous religious interpretations of the world” (Craig in Cowan, 2000:183). Arguing the case for Christianity using postmodern standards will only make it weaker in the process, in effect accommodating to the same subjectivities and relativisms as the postmodernists. Postmodernity does require an apologetic response, but not one that abandons reason in the process.

Postmoderns contend there is no objective truth, only subjective truths. For them, knowledge of reality is a mental, and social construct developed *via* our earthly experiences. The postmodern contends there is no single way of determining truth, and therefore, classical-evidential apologetics are irrelevant. The classical-evidentialist response to the postmodern has been that their contentions are self-defeating; in effect, a

building constructed on a shifting sand pile. Dan Story, for example, does not believe so-called postmoderns as nearly as rooted in relativism they suggest:

The majority of people on the street still view the world through modernist eyes. Even people who openly endorse postmodernism and argue for relativism do not live consistently with this philosophy -- especially when it conflicts with their self-interests. Although religious pluralism and moral relativism are quickly becoming ingrained in modern culture, the majority of people still think in terms of absolutes and accept the reality of logic and reason. These people need their intellectual obstacles to faith removed (Story, 1998:170).

J.W. Montgomery believes, “the effective apologist must be willing to engage in an uncompromising, frontal attack on prevailing non-Christian worldviews. Liberal accommodationism has to be rejected out of hand. Any gains from compromise are trivial when compared to the losses -- losses in integrity and in the power of the gospel message” (Montgomery, 2002). Historical, evidential truth claims are apologetically presented to answer questions, remove doubt and to enable people to make a reasonable response. Ronald Nash adds: “Theistic evidentialists and their anti-theistic counterparts start from the same presupposition, namely, that the rationality of religious belief depends upon the discovery of evidence or arguments to support the belief” (Nash, 1988:71).

Evidently, what is necessary for effective Christian witness in a pluralistic world is an objective apologetic -- a ‘reason for the hope that is in you’ -- that will give the non-Christian clear ground for experientially trying the Christian faith before all other options. Absolute proof of the truth of Christ’s claims is available only in personal relationship with Him; but contemporary man has every right to expect us to offer solid reasons for making such a total commitment. The apologetic task is justified not as a rational substitute for faith, but as a ground for faith; not as a replacement for the Spirit’s working, but as a means by which the objective truth of God’s Word can

be made clear so that men will heed it as the vehicle of the Spirit who convicts the world through its message (Montgomery, 1978:40).

As mentioned previously, when the claims of world religions are compared, there *are* significant differences. Postmoderns are typically quite eclectic about religion, taking a pragmatic, ‘whatever works,’ approach. In response, the Christian apologist cannot convince all doubters that Jesus is the only way, but they can help define and delineate critical differences, making the issues clear. As Gary Habermas and Michael Licona suggest, “Jesus leaves no room for ambiguity. Jesus either rose from the dead confirming his claims to divinity or he was a fraud” (Habermas, 2004:28). J.W. Montgomery adds:

The historic Christian claim differs qualitatively from the claims of all other world religions at the epistemological point: on the issue of testability. Eastern faiths and Islam, to take familiar examples, ask the uncommitted seeker to discover their truth experientially: the faith-experience will be self-validating. Unhappily, as analytical philosopher Kai Nielsen and others have rigorously shown, a subjective faith-experience is logically incapable of “validating God-talk” -- including the alleged absolutes about which the god in question does the talking. Christianity, on the other hand, declares that the truth of its absolute claims rests squarely on certain historical facts, open to ordinary investigation. These facts relate essentially to the man Jesus, His presentation of Himself as God in human flesh, and His resurrection from the dead as proof of His deity (Montgomery, 1991:319).

J.W. Montgomery strongly cautions that the Christian response -- especially to relativists like postmoderns -- does not become limited to only presuppositionalism, or fideism. How many times and ways have God’s own retreated to the desert, both literally and figuratively, to avoid the challenges brought against the faith by a sceptical world? This is avoiding the challenges, tough questions and doubts of our generation.

Christianity does not benefit from assuming only the fideist position that some Christians and many other religions take. Faith *per se*, is a good and necessary

component of the overall package, but one's religious convictions still need to be built upon something of substance: there must be some substantive reason why you believe what you do.

Under no circumstances should we retreat into a presuppositionalism or a fideism which would rob our fellow men of the opportunity to consider the Christian faith seriously with head as well as heart. Our apologetic task is not fulfilled until we remove the intellectual offenses that allow so many non-Christians to reject the gospel with scarcely a hearing. We must bring them to the only legitimate offense: the offense of the Cross. We must make clear to them beyond a shadow of doubt that if they reject the Lord of glory, it will be by reason of willful refusal to accept His grace, not because His Word is incapable of withstanding the most searching intellectual examination... When the Greeks of our day come seeking Jesus (John 12:20-21), let us make certain they find Him (Montgomery, 1978:41).

While postmoderns seem to relish their relativistic and pluralistic position, I am not at all convinced that any of them truly wants the life-instability that attends their position. They too want something that goes beyond meeting a present need: they too want something of real and lasting value. Like all mankind, postmoderns want something real to believe in. Their doubts, like the doubts of peoples of all ages, are rooted in fear: mostly an uncertainty about the future and what happens at death. Other ideologies and religions attempt to answer such questions and quench these fears -- but only Christianity can fully answer and alleviate them all.

Postmodern doubts about Christ and the Bible are hardly new. People have always doubted the validity of Jesus' claims, and questioned the authenticity and authority of the Bible. Before the New Testament canon was even complete, heresies abounded, not least among them, Gnosticism. Jesus' own disciples, who lived with Him daily for months, had doubts. Philip expressed His doubts about Jesus' relationship to *Yahweh*, 'the Father' (Joh. 14:8-11). Those who first came to the empty tomb (*cf.*, Luk. 24) could not believe He had risen from dead, though Jesus told them He would (Mat. 12:40). Thomas

in particular would, or could not, believe: “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe” (Joh. 20:24-25). Then Jesus provided tangible evidence to confirm this seemingly impossible truth:

After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, “Peace to you!” Then He said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.” And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name (Joh. 20:26-31).

Jesus knew the doubting hearts of people and responded with perceptible proofs. Jesus did not rise from the dead and immediately return to heaven, leaving no without eyewitness accounts of His resurrection. He instead purposely stayed many days to tangibly prove Himself to many (*cf.*, Joh. 20:30-31). His own disciples were then so fully convinced of His resurrection, that all would go on to boldly preach His life, death and resurrection wherever they went, facing persecution and death for these beliefs.

It is quite natural to believe only what we can ‘know’ sensually, or tangibly. If we can ‘touch’ something, like Thomas, we too are more inclined to believe. Doubting is part of the life of faith, and a challenge for all faith adherents. Doubting reveals humanity’s natural inclination toward, and need for, the correspondence theory of truth -- that the intangible must correspond to the tangible -- the human essential postmoderns and other relativists attempt to deny.

The Christian witness to the postmodernist must rest in reality -- even if the postmodernists [falsely] claim that reality is un-real and truth socially constructed and

irrelevant. The postmodernist, like other relativists and pluralists, tends to accept all religions on an equal footing, and is open to all so-called truth claims. They believe “no religious worldview is objectively true” (Okholm, 1995:77). While they argue against the possibility of truth, a voice within them that says that whatever is true, must accord with what is real. Thus a “statement or proposition is (objectively) true if and only if it corresponds to reality... if reality is just as the statement says that it is” (*ibid.* 78). Daniel Taylor says:

The ruling methodology for reaching truth in our secular culture reflects the dominance of the scientific model... one amasses evidence -- as analyzed, classified, and approved by reason -- guarding at all times against methodological lapses (like subjective bias, logical fallacy, faulty or misinterpreted data), until one reaches something very like certainty, until one has proof. Now, professional philosophers and other academics will readily admit that absolute certainty of course is not attainable (Taylor, 1992:78).

The postmoderns rightly argue against the infallibility of modernist claims to absolutes. As valuable as science is, it is still often a process of trial and error, where corrections, changes, and updates are common. Too often theories, like the Theory of Evolution, are assumed true and infallible, while still far short of attaining the level of natural law. While anything man sets his hand to is fallible, there are still absolute truths in creation. Postmodern doubts about absolutely certainty are unwarranted, but their criticism of scientific certainty is warranted.

Because so much of the Western church has succumbed to modernist thinking, the church too has at times fallen into the error of viewing Scripture in terms of scientific absolutes. Evidential apologists are among those that need to guard against such extremism. As valuable as these biblical defences are, Lesslie Newbigin cautions that we resist the temptation to absolutize the Bible as some scientific axiom. “The knowledge of God given to us through the gospel is a matter of faith, not of indubitable certainty” (Newbigin, 1996:77). For this notion “comes from captivity to the typical

modernist illusion that there is available to us a kind of objective knowledge wholly sanitized from contamination by any ‘subjective’ elements” (*ibid.*). Newbigin continues:

In a culture that has learned to accept as authoritative only those truth-claims that can be validated by the method of Descartes, it is natural that Christian apologists should fall into this trap, as some conservative Christians have done.... We must let the Bible speak for itself, opening our minds to be reshaped by this listening (Newbigin, 1996:79).

The Christian faith is not about removing all doubts, for that would remove the need for faith; something God has not seen fit to provide. Even science is a process of faith steps, working through a series of tests and experiments until one proves, or disproves a theorem. While the Christian faith can be supported and encouraged by historical, evidential proofs, the faith remains rooted in a personal and corporate trust in God. God has revealed himself through nature, the Bible and the historical Jesus. He also reveals Himself every day, around the world, in and through the lives of those who are His own. As J.W. Montgomery has argued for a life-time, faith in Christ is not rooted in absolute, concrete, unquestionable certainties: it is based upon an overwhelming weight of evidence, which makes judge and jury fully persuaded.

Theologian J.I. Packer affirms that God’s revelation forms the basis for trust: “Throughout the bible trust in God is made to rest on belief of what he has revealed concerning his character and purposes” (Packer, in Elwell, 1984:400). In the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Packer defines three aspects of biblical faith: 1) Faith in God involves right belief about God; (2) Faith rests on divine testimony; (3) Faith is a supernatural divine gift (Packer, in Elwell, 1984:399; *cf.*, 1Jn. 4, 5). Even life-time student and critic of Christianity, Mortimer Adler, was forced to admit:

If I am able to say no more than that a preponderance of reasons favor believing that God exists, I can still say I have advanced reasonable grounds for that belief... I am persuaded that God exists, either beyond a reasonable doubt or by a preponderance of reasons in favor of that conclusion over reasons against it. I am, therefore, willing to

terminate this inquiry with the statement that I have reasonable grounds for affirming God's existence (Adler, 1980:150).

Compromise *versus* Contextualisation

All manner of modernists, pluralists and relativists have demanded that God's people compromise their beliefs in Christ and Scripture -- exchanging supernaturalism for naturalism, and theocentricity for anthropocentricity. In recent decades, the postmodernists have joined these critics, pressing the church even harder to compromise their traditions, beliefs, and moral values. Sadly, many traditional streams of the church *have* compromised to the demands of prevailing culture, instead of remaining the 'set-apart,' or holy and prophetic people God called and established them to be.

Especially in this context, compromise has meant coming to terms with critics and doubters through concession -- the Hegelian dialectic at work, which (again) Francis Schaeffer warned the church about several decades ago. Back in 1947, Carl F.H. Henry began publicly criticizing Christians for compromise, and for their withdrawal from the public arena. Later, in *Twilight of a Great Civilization: The Drift toward Neo-Paganism* (1988), Henry said: "We live in the twilight of a great civilization, amid the deepening decline of modern culture... much of what passes for practical Christianity is really an apostate compromise with the spirit of the age" (1988:15).

God's people have always faced opposition in some form -- yet are at all times called, mandated and Spirit-empowered to be light and salt to a sin-corrupted world (*cf.*, Mat. 4:16). God's people are called out from the world, but until glorification are hardly untainted by sin: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). God's people, in their weaknesses, but God's power, provide a living witness about Him, reflecting God's glory.

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God -- and righteousness and sanctification and redemption -- that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord" (1Co. 1:26-31).

God's people glory in Him, not in themselves. Their witness to others should never point to themselves, but to God and to His perfection, who alone is worthy of praise and worship. "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us" (2Co. 4:7). God alone is sovereign over all, and His own are called to obediently and proactively engage in *Missio Dei* -- God's redeeming mission to the world. Yet, it is always and only God who saves, not man. Redeemed, justified, and filled with the Spirit, God's people endeavour, with His help, to be as He is. Yet, at our best, we are mere reflections of His inestimable glory -- even as the moon reflects the power and magnificence of the sun.

Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy" (1Pe. 1:13-16; *cf.*, Exo. 19:6; Lev. 19:2).

The world wants the church to be as it is, because the world does not want to change (*cf.*, 2Pe. 2:22). At the root of this is the spirit of the anti-Christ at work, denying in many subversive ways, God's rightful place in all things. The humanists do not want people to

consider the spiritual truths the Bible articulates, so they work to undermine Scriptures authority. This too is the spirit of the anti-Christ at work.

Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also (1Jn. 2:18-23).

In contrast to compromise, God calls the corrupt to conversion, or change, and turning from their wicked ways (*cf.*, Joh. 3:1-20). When God's people compromise and behave as the world does, there is no longer light, salt, witness and hope for those lost in the darkness of sin-corruption. God purposes His own to be different and counter-cultural, pointing people to God through acts of love and words of truth. Missiologists sometimes call this a holistic witness, or the incarnational approach, where the gospel is 'incarnated,' or made flesh, in and through the missionary, so that people everywhere may not only hear the gospel spoken, but also see it 'lived out' among them.

Jesus, *Immanuel* (Isa. 7:14, 8:8; Mat. 1:23), is holiness personified. He calls His followers to live a life of holiness, but certainly not self-righteousness, like the religious leaders of His day. Like the prophets Amos and Hosea, Jesus appealed for more than ceremonial holiness, saying: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (Hos. 6:6; Matt. 12:7). When God's people compromise to the demands and lures of the world, the prophets are sent to challenge and correct them, calling them back to 'set-apart' thinking and living. Jesus, like the prophets and apostles, taught that true holiness was expressed in patient, obedient, and loving service, while awaiting the Lord's return. Knowing Christ was

coming again has always been a means of motivating God's own to be about their Lord's business (*cf.*, 1Jn. 3:1-3).

The church often confuses these concepts of 'compromise' and 'contextualization.' Christians often erroneously assume that contextualisation means compromise; which is certainly not the case, especially when contextualisation is done correctly. Contextualisation means that believers attempt to "communicate the gospel in word and deed and to establish the church in ways that make sense to people with their local cultural context, presenting Christianity in such a way that it meets people's deepest needs and penetrates their worldview, thus allowing them to follow Christ and remain with their own culture" (Bevans, 1999:43). We must seek to maintain the tension, or balance, between an insider's deep understanding and the outsider's critique, which in Anthropology is called the 'emic' and 'etic' perspectives.

One example of this is the way so many of the so-called main-line churches in North America have compromised doctrinally, but have almost totally resisted making any changes to their style of worship. On the one hand, homosexual ordinations and marriages are approved of, standing in contrast to long-held traditions and more importantly the teachings of Scripture. Taking this course is thought to put them more in accord with contemporary society -- in truth, nothing more than compromise.

Postmodern trends would have the church compromise all to please the whims and weaknesses of the flesh. This is precisely what so many churches have done, and it will be their undoing -- not to mention how it must displease the Lord. Instead, we are called to be relevant, or contextual, with our society -- without compromise. God's people are to discern the times, to know how best to speak to their generation, yet without compromising who and what they are (*cf.*, 1Ch. 12:32; Mat. 24:32-35; Act. 17:16-34).

Contextualisation is a relatively new word, first used around 1972 by Shoki Coe. The concept, however, was employed by St. Patrick among the Celts, by the Italian Jesuit missionary Roberto de Nobili among Hindus in the early 17th Century, and by the Apostle Paul among the Greeks (*cf.*, Act. 17), to name just a few. Contextualized approaches seek to present the unchanging word of God in the varying languages and cultures of human beings (Anderson, 1998:333). Contextualization explains how God's

people are to effectively participate in God's mission (*Missio Dei*) to the world. The term is derived from 'context' from the Latin, *textus*, and means 'weaving together.' Contextualization can be defined as "making concepts and methods relevant to a historical situation" (Anderson, 1998:318). Missiological contextualization can be "viewed as enabling the message of God's redeeming love in Jesus Christ to become alive as it addresses the vital issues of a socio-cultural context and transforms its worldview, its values, and its goals" (Tabor, 1978:55, in Anderson, 1998:318).

Contrary to the older missiological terms, accommodation (as originally used), and indigenization, contextualization "conveys a deeper involvement of the cultural context in the missiological process and a greater sensitivity to situations where rapid social change is occurring" (Coe, 1976:19-22, in Anderson, 1998:318). Contextualization is a broad and complex topic (*cf.*, Bosch, 1991:420-432).

The ultimate goal of contextualization is that the Church be enabled in a particular time and place to witness to Christ in a way that is both faithful to the gospel and meaningful to men, women, and children in the cultural, social, political, and religious conditions of that time and place (Desrochers, 1982:23).

Pre-eminent South African missiologist, David Bosch, said it is incumbent upon God's people to interpret the "signs of the times." These interpretations are risky, because they are sometimes incorrect. "Matthew's parables of the reign of God emphasize the need for watching (Mat. 25)" (Bosch, 1991:430). Scripture, history, and the Holy Spirit's guidance are the greatest interpretive tools we have. Scripture provides a foundational understanding of the base nature of man -- a benchmark -- making future thoughts and actions of mankind generally predictable. History provides additional insights about the nature of mankind. With these basic tools, and guided by the Holy Spirit (*cf.*, Rom. 12:1-2), God's people can acquire understanding about all things (Eph. 1:15-23), even as we are now doing about the seeming complexities of our post, or ultra modern cultural climate.

A built-in risk of contextualization is that the human situation and the culture of peoples so dominate the inquiry that God's revelation

through the Bible will be diminished. To be aware of this danger is a necessary step in avoiding it. Contextualization cannot take place unless Scripture is read and obeyed by believers. This means that believers will study the Scriptures carefully and respond to their cultural concerns in light of what is in the biblical text. Culture is subject to the God of culture. Culture is important to God and for all its good and bad factors, culture is that framework within which God works out God's purposes. Some indications of the gospel's presence in the soil may be evident, but Scripture is something that is outside and must be brought into the cultural setting to more fully understand what God is doing in culture, and to find parallels between the culture and the Bible (Gilliland, in Moreau, 2000:227).

Consider also this oft-misused passage from 1 Corinthians, where the Apostle Paul speaks about our freedoms in Christ, along with our witness to others:

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you (1Co. 9:19-23).

This passage is not license for Christians to live corruptly as the world does. Nor is it permission to do anything in our human power to bring others into the Christian fold -- the ends justifying the means. When the Apostle says he becomes like one without Law, he is not saying that he lives the base life of so many godless heathens, so as to 'fit in.' For the Apostle Paul to be without the Law, means he did not let Jewish religious customs become a barrier between him and the gentiles. He instead, contextualized his

witness among the Gentiles, by using his freedom in Christ. This meant he could participate in Jewish religious customs, or not, because these practices were not what made him one with Christ and right with God. Paul in no way endorses, or even implies that immoral and unethical living is permitted in order to effectively witness to those distant from God. It is very unfortunate this passage has so often been misused in our ultra-modern context, to give permission to Christians for ungodly, unethical and immoral living. Charles C. Ryrie writes:

Paul is not demonstrating two-facedness or multi-facedness, but rather he is testifying of a constant, restrictive self-discipline in order to be able to serve all sorts of men. Just as a narrowly channeled stream is more powerful than an unbounded marshy swamp, so restricted liberty results in more powerful testimony for Christ (Charles C. Ryrie, in MacDonald, 1997).

The section of Scripture addresses the issue of contextualization without moral compromise. The Apostle describes how he disciplined himself like an athlete to keep from dishonouring Christ, yet providing an effective witness to the Gentiles. “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1Co. 9:27). William Arnot says:

God’s method of binding souls to obedience is similar to His method of keeping the planets in their orbits -- that is, by flinging them out free. You see no chain keeping back these shining worlds to prevent them from bursting away from their center. They are held in the grip of an invisible principle. ... And it is by the invisible bond of love -- love to the Lord who bought them -- that ransomed men are constrained to live soberly and righteously and Godly (Arnot, in MacDonald, 1997).

Dr. Isaac Zokoue affirms, with so many others, the uniqueness and superiority of Christ among all other contenders, and that the evidences in support of Christ’s claims are sufficient. Thus, Christ alone is the “hope and judgment of the entire world” (Zokoue, in Nichols, 1994:242).

The affirmation of the unique Christ as the hope and judgment of the world has its basis in the very history of salvation. We would do well to remember... that the eschatological Christ is the very one who was announced by the prophets, was born in Palestine, was crucified under Pontius Pilate and rose again on the third day... The person of Christ is present throughout human history from beginning to end" (Zokoue, in Nicholls, 1994:233-234).

God's own cannot retreat from the inevitable challenges that come, no matter what form they take. Our battles are primarily rooted in unseen realities and powers (*cf.*, 2Co. 10:1-6; Eph. 6:10-20); but all are manifested in daily life. Missiologist David Hesselgrave adds:

In a world of religious pluralism, evangelical witness, preaching and teaching should become increasingly dialogical -- answering those questions and objections raised by non-Christian respondents rather than simply answering questions of the evangelical's own devising. In the words of my colleague and friend, Carl F.H. Henry, 'the only adequate alternative to dialogue that deletes the evangelical view is dialogue that expounds it. The late twentieth century is no time to shrink from that dialogue' (Hesselgrave, 1978:238).

While not all Christians would call themselves, Evangelical, all Christians are biblically mandated to share their faith, which to some degree makes them 'evangelical.' Aside from semantics, the point is God has already given believers all they need to be effective witness in the world, whether the contextual challenge to the faith is another religion, pluralism, relativism, or even postmodernity.

Chapter VI

Postmodernity and the Decline of Western Christianity

The decline of Christianity in the West is obvious to even the casual observer, but the reasons for it are not nearly as obvious. The reasons are partly attributable to a cultural phenomenon known as the disestablishment of Christianity, or Post-Christendom as some call it. Post-Christendom is a cultural dynamic distinct from postmodernity, but one that continues to work conjointly with postmodernity making significant changes in Western culture, and in Western Christianity. Though the two cultural dynamics are separate and distinct, postmodernity has, without question, complemented modernity in amplifying the disestablishment of Christianity.

Like postmodernity, assessments concerning the disestablishment of Christianity run the gamut. For some it is the worst thing that has ever happened to the faith, for others the best. In this section, it is as much my purpose to consider the oft confused relationship between the cultural dynamics of postmodernity and Christian disestablishment, as well as to differentiate them, so that their impact individually and together might be better understood -- as much as that is possible.

Standing in stark contrast to the phenomenal growth of the faith in the non-Western world, is the ongoing decline of the faith in the West. Even in the United States, the last bastion of vital Western Christianity, the faith continues to change. As Philip Jenkins, Alister E. McGrath, Lamin Sanneh and others have noted, Christianity has changed profoundly over the past one hundred years. No longer is the faith inextricably European. The largest communities of Christians are now found in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The contemporary stereotypic Christian is more likely Chinese, Nigerian, or Brazilian. By all projections, the size of the church in the non-West will only keep getting larger, while the church in the West keeps getting smaller. Despite this, the Western church is still by far the wealthiest, but also in large part, the most Liberal and arrogant.

Over the centuries, European Christianity was mostly faithful to share Christ with the nations, pushing the faith to the peripheries where had not been before. In so doing, new centres of the faith were established. Professor Walls calls this the serial, or periodic, movement of Christianity (Walls, 2000:792f). At the same time Christianity was growing in the non-West, the “Christian West” has increasingly become a misnomer and a non-reality. How did one of the most significant incubators of the faith -- principally Western Europe and the UK -- become so devoid of vigour? Further, what is the nature of Christian disestablishment in the West, and how has postmodernity contributed?

The decline of the faith in the West has been a (a) political and (b) socio-cultural disestablishment. Both ‘disestablishment’ and ‘post-Christendom’ are the terms now commonly used to describe the decline and cultural marginalisation of the church in Western societies. “Disestablishment is the process by which the organized church loses its special legal privileges within a state and becomes a private association in some sense” (Guder, 2000:7). Post-Christendom refers to the fading presence of religio-political relationships between historical Christianity and state powers. Christendom was the imperial stage of European Christianity “when the church became a domain of the state, and Christian profession a matter of political enforcement” (Sanneh, 2003:23).

It is now indisputable that the Christian faith in Europe has long been more social veneer than the true faith. Driving the marginalisation of Christianity in the West is a great scepticism about the claims of orthodox Christianity, even inside the church and amongst its own leaders. As we have already discussed, modernity, postmodernity and the growth of religious and other pluralisms has literally brought Western Christianity to its knees in many places where it once thrived. Challenges to the faith are routine and to be expected; but where the church in the West has so failed Christ, is in its surrender to the prevailing culture. In Europe, the Roman Catholic Church has more effectively resisted cultural compromise than Protestant groups -- some of which may soon disappear (*cf.*, Church of Scotland). The Enlightenment has worked for many decades to weaken the church, challenging especially trust in the Bible, but also in the historical Jesus. Now in addition, postmodernity has worked like a virulent cancer, spreading relativistic doubts and confusion *en masse*.

Postmodernism enhances the process of de-secularisation: it endorses the resurgence of spirituality, reflects loss of confidence in rationalism and science and urges pursuit of authentic humanity. It regards all ‘meta-narratives,’ (overarching explanations and truth claims) as inherently oppressive. Uninterested in coherent systems or consistency, it is relativistic, playful, pessimistic and sceptical (Murray, May 2004).

For centuries Western societies were rooted in a worldview that assumed a “system of trust based on transcendent absolutes and of submission to a supreme God” (Fernando, in Carson, 2000:134). The Enlightenment project worked dutifully to remove religion from the Western intellectual framework, and in many ways succeeded. While the Enlightenment did not remove religion as it had hoped (*cf.*, Secularisation Theory), it has helped to strip away the facade of cultural Christianity (*i.e.*, Christendom), unveiling a faith in most places that has little vitality. People in Western nations have now been shown to be culturally ‘Christianized,’ but hardly Christian.

In some ways modernity has actually done the faith a great favour. In revealing the many faults of Christendom, there is now hope for a truer, healthier faith to develop, and there are encouraging signs that this is in fact happening. Postmodernity is actually helping in other ways, because it counters modernity’s anti-supernatural penchant, and once again ‘allows’ people to be spiritual. In this new cultural milieu, Christianity can potentially thrive again -- though it will certainly continue contending with modernity and the remnants of postmodernity.

Scepticism based on the assumed infallibility and universal sovereignty of reason was the constitutive character of modernity. It was designed to eliminate faith and re-channel man’s inherent compulsion to submit and worship. New Gods and new traditions were invented, new prophets were proclaimed and new heavens were imagined. But religion has not only survived the five hundred year assault on God and his messages, but has returned with an increased fervor that

baffles the postmodern being (Khan, 2000).

The decline of Western Christianity is not wholly attributable to secular cultural forces. Over the centuries, Western Christianity developed a deep-rooted arrogance that pervaded all streams of the faith to some degree. It came to be widely assumed that the Western cultural expression of the faith was the only right and proper expression. This attitudinal carry-over from Christendom, is sadly, still very much alive today.

If the postmodern cultural wave has done anything positive for the church, it has challenged it to consider (a) how deeply it has embraced modernity; (b) how much it needs to reconsider its proper place in society, as a prophetic community committed to Christ first; and (c) how truly arrogant it has become over the years, in many ways thanks to the socio-cultural privilege it has long enjoyed. In this regard, Deuteronomy 8 is an accurate prescription that speaks to contemporary [Western] Christianity. As Deuteronomy 8 suggests, even God's own tend to forget where their blessings come from in time, and for our own sake, God's disciplines those He loves (*cf.*, Heb. 12:1f). "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent" (1Co. 1:19b, c; *cf.*, Deu. 8; 1Co. 1:18f).

The late Lesslie Newbigin spoke in 1984 of the church's need for "missionary encounter with our own culture." As is so true for diagnosing individual and organizational dysfunctionalities, an outside perspective can be enormously helpful -- that is, if the subject is willing to listen. Very often consultants are brought in to help an organization diagnose its problems, but the verdict rendered is of little use if the organization under scrutiny will not at least consider the recommendations. Newbigin suggested that the fast-fading Western church enlist the help of non-Western Christians, who could provide an outside, objective, yet intimately concerned opinion.

We need their witness to correct ours, as indeed they need ours to correct theirs. At this moment our need is greater, for they have been far more aware of the danger of syncretism, of an illegitimate alliance with false elements in their culture, than we have been. But... we imperatively need one another if we are to be faithful witnesses to Christ (Newbigin, in Walls, 2002:69).

Yet, with few exceptions, the Western church, even in its still desperate condition, has refused to humble itself to others, even its own from non-Western Christianity. Prof. Walls agreed with Newbigin, that Western Christians need non-Western Christians to help them assess current cultural challenges to the faith, to especially help them see how deeply they have syncretistically succumbed to surrounding culture (Walls, 2002:69). There is no question that the Western church has deeply embraced modernity, and oddly enough, it is in some ways postmodernity that is not only challenging modernity, but modernity in the church. Where God's people will not listen to their own prophets, God will use whatever means necessary to produce needed changes. Ancient Israel is a classic example of this; yet, these lessons seem lost on the contemporary Western church.

Among Christian academics, Western schools remain the preferred choice, and few from the non-West are ever brought 'into the system,' as it were. Yet, one has to question this logic; for if these training centres are so superior to others around the world, why is the faith community in their own back yards so anaemic? If departments of theology in the UK, for example, are so superior, why is the faith in such a dire condition in their own country? How wise is it then, for non-Western training centres to emulate their Western counter-parts?

In the US, the same sort of arrogance runs rampant throughout many Christian training centres. Perhaps worst of all is the ingrained sense of [Western] doctrinal and cultural superiority regularly passed on to new generations of church leaders, who in turn look down upon their non-Western brethren. Still it is at so many of these supposedly superior Western centres for the training of global Christian leadership, that the Word of God is no longer trusted and revered: instead treated as just another historical treatise, where man stands in judgment. The teachings of these arrogant, anthropocentric schools are of course then manifested in church praxis, where homosexual ordinations and the blessing of homosexual relationships have become all too common. Where is this taught in Scripture?

We can expect those outside the church to challenge the veracity and integrity of Scripture, the faith historically, and the teachings of the church -- for this is what they have always done. However, for those supposedly inside the faith, who claim to trust

Christ, to do the same, amounts to nothing less than apostasy. These “clouds without water, carried about by the winds” (Jde. 12), are those who have embraced human arrogance. They have long since given up the true faith for some religious construction that tickles their rebellious ears.

While there is nothing wrong with mining the deeper truths of Scripture (*cf.*, Pro. 2), and digging into the historical evidences of the faith, setting puny human minds above God’s eternal wisdom and understanding is dangerous business. It leads to all manner of human justifications, self-deceptions and a certain decline into apostasy, which is precisely what has happened to some US churches (*cf.*, EC-USA, UCC), who years ago embraced Liberal teachings and put themselves above God. “These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage” (Jde. 16). These same arrogant boasters then even put themselves in judgment of their non-Western brethren who dare to trust in Scripture and the God who gave it. May God continue to bless His faithful remnant.

Historical Christendom

To better understand the contemporary impact of Post-Christendom, we will now briefly trace the historical development of Christendom. Stuart Murray, in *Post-Christendom* (2004), provides a much fuller discussion on this. Ralph D. Winter provides additional valuable insights in his supplement to Latourette’s great historical work (*The World Christian Movement 1950-1975: An Interpretive Essay*, in Latourette, 1975:2), as does Andrew F. Walls in, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (2002), chapter 3.

Early Christianity had many competitors. In addition to the imperial *cultus* were the mystery religions, and the more traditional religious and philosophical cults inherited from the Greeks and various other cultures. Because Judaism was uniquely tolerated by

Rome, ‘The Way’ (*i.e.*, Christianity) was allowed to prosper as a Jewish sect. As Christianity became more Gentile and less Jewish, however, Rome became more intolerant. Various persecutions arose, those under Nero and Diocletian among the most violent.

The early church routinely refused to accept the marginalised Roman status as *cultus privatus* (*i.e.*, private cult). Many early believers chose instead to maintain their public posture, which meant living in tension with prevailing culture, and the general values of society. The Roman government typically moved according to the whims of the Caesar. Rome purposed to dominate all ideologies, especially those it perceived to be a threat. We see much the same thing over the years as Totalitarian governments (*e.g.*, Nazi Germany, Soviet Union) felt threatened by the church and consequently worked to undermine its influence. In our day, such states still exist (*e.g.*, China), where the government really cares little about the religion people embrace, so long as they do not threaten the hegemony of the state and its ruling elite. Not a few over the years have interpreted John’s Revelation in the light of the tension between God’s people and the rulers of earthly kingdoms.

Historically, Christendom effectively begins with Emperor Constantine’s embrace of the faith. Historians continue to argue whether Constantine embraced Christianity for personal or political reasons, but it seems certain his political reasons were strong. During his famous march to Rome in 312 AD, he knew his formidable opponent, Maxentius, would be relying on pagan magic and quite likely felt it worthwhile having the Christian God on his side in addition to other favourite pagan deities. Whatever his true motivations, Constantine won the decisive with Maxentius at Mulvian Bridge, his enemy Maxentius perishing in the Tiber River, along with thousands of his troops. Constantine “entered Rome the welcomed and undisputed master of the West” (Durant, 1944:654).

To consolidate support in all provinces, Constantine decided to embrace Christianity, rather than oppose it as several of his predecessors had unsuccessfully done. The Edict of Milan (313 AD) officially declared Roman tolerance for the faith. His policy of religious toleration did not then make Christianity the sole state religion: that would follow under

later Emperors. Constantine consequently supported both pagan and Christian adherents, taking for himself the title of “*pontifex maximus* as chief priest of the pagan state cult” (Latourette, 1975:93:1).

Constantine recognized the social value Christians provided, not least of which was their ability to unify and lend a higher morality. He had also seen during his lifetime three failed persecutions against the Christians, which only seemed to further unite them and clarify their beliefs. By contrast, “the pagan majority was divided among many creeds, and included a dead weight of simple souls without conviction or influence” (Durant, 1944:656). He seemed to recognize, as others before him had not, that defusing tensions with the Christian sect would likely do more to quiet them, than violent persecution which only further unified and strengthened their resolve. Constantine was:

impressed by the comparative order and morality of Christian conduct, the bloodless beauty of Christian ritual, the obedience of Christians to their clergy, their humble acceptance of life’s inequalities in the hope of a happiness beyond the grave; perhaps this new religion would purify Roman morals, regenerate marriage and the family, and allay the fever of class war (*ibid*, 656).

As his power grew, Constantine came to favour Christianity more openly, and grew less concerned about disgruntled majority pagans. In time, Constantine,

gave Christian bishops the authority of judges in their dioceses; other laws exempted Church realty from taxation, made Christian associations juridical persons, allowed them to own land and receive bequests, and assigned the property of intestate martyrs to the Church. Constantine gave money to need congregations, built several churches in Constantinople and elsewhere, and forbade the worship of images in the new capital... he prohibited the meeting of heretical sects, and finally ordered the destruction of their conventicles (Durant, 1944:656).

All over the Roman Empire, Christians rejoiced, for peace and prosperity had finally become their portion in life. Of no small importance to the development of the faith,

were the changes made to the clergy. Pagan clergy had considerable privilege in Roman society, which were now granted to Christian clerics as well. Instead of persecution, marginalisation, and disrespect, there was prosperity, social and financial privilege and peace. This, however, immediately invited people into the clergy who were less than sincere about the faith. Jesus may well have warned about precisely this kind of thing: “But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep” (Joh. 10:12-13). Further changes also significantly changed the Christian faith, as:

the Christian Sunday was ordered placed in the same legal position as the pagan feasts, and provincial governors were instructed to respect the days in memory of the martyrs and to honour the festivals of the churches... He [Constantine] prohibited the repair of ruined [pagan] temples and the erection of new images of the gods. He forbade any attempt to force Christians to participate in non-Christian religious ceremonies (Latourette, 1975:93).

These many privileges given to the church increasingly domesticated it *via* the luxuries afforded it. Many Christian remembrances were pluralistically mixed with pagan and state culture, which remain in Western Christianity to this day. To what extent Christianity redeemed Roman culture, or compromised with it, is still debated. The post-Constantine period saw the church become deeply indigenized within Roman and eventually various other Western cultures. Where the long years of persecution had refined the church, the years of peace and privilege that followed enabled the faithful to begin contemplating their beliefs, which almost immediately led to “the monastic secession, the Donatist schism, [and] the Arian heresy” (Durant, 1944:657). The peace with larger culture was not all good for Christianity, however, which too quickly became apathetic and lethargic, as organisations are prone to do when their reason for being (*raison d’etre*) shifts, or becomes less clear.

Years later, with the collapse of the Roman Empire (c.476 AD), the Roman Catholic Church filled the governmental void, providing necessary services and invaluable

leadership to an otherwise chaotic Europe. “In a sense the church continued the Roman Empire; if Rome had lost imperial significance, it was still the seat of the Empire of Christ, even when the Holy Roman Emperor sat elsewhere. The role of the Christian church in maintaining and transmitting, in residual form, the cultural legacy of Rome strengthened the conception” (Walls, 2002:37). Thus, it was that to be a member of the church was to be part of the legacy of the Roman Empire. “In general, the context of Christendom continued as the guarantor and protector of Christianity as the dominant religious force in society” (Guder, 1998:114).

In something of an historical irony, the Protestant Reformation actually helped bring about the disestablishment of Medieval Christendom. “The Reformation joined in this process leading toward modern secularisation by questioning the authority and certainty of Medieval Christian culture” (Guder, 1998:6). Following the Reformation, “the place and power of the institutional churches within their societies have gradually diminished” (*ibid.*). Guder continues, explaining how the European state rulers gradually gained power over the Church. Thus, the progression from pagan Roman state rule, to Roman Church rule, to secular state rule took place. In time, “the church was both protected and managed for political purposes” (*ibid.* 7).

Many agree that Christendom proper really ended with the French Revolution, though it has certainly died a slow, lingering death. Vestiges of Christendom remain today, especially where it still legally exists (*e.g.*, UK). During the revolutionary period in Europe (c. late 18th Century), people revolted against the privileged place of the church in society, as well as the widespread corruption among clerics and aristocrats. In some places, like France and Russia, the disestablishment of the church came quickly and violently. In France, the separation of church and state c.1800, coupled with a hearty Enlightenment climate, pushed their society toward strict separation of church and state. “In the French case, a hard-edged secularism emerged and acquired a life of its own, with state jurisdiction expanding to make religion subordinate” (Sanneh, 2003:9). Lamin Sanneh adds that in France especially, secularism was ‘hard,’ versus the softer version that later developed in the United States. Professor Walls adds that the “dissolution of Christendom made possible a cultural diffusion of Christianity that is now in the process

of transforming it... Christendom is dead, and Christianity is alive and well without it” (Walls, 2002:35).

We must also consider the French connection, as it were, between the Western disestablishment of Christianity and the postmodern cultural wave. As Roland Benediktor notes the postmoderns are directly linked to the French revolutionary spirit and without question a product of it. Here again, we find an unequivocal correlation between these two dynamics, still very much at work in our era.

The Christendom notion fully survived the Reformation, carried on by the Protestants who wanted a ‘Reformed’ Christendom, not a ‘Catholic’ Christendom. A number of Protestant groups sought the purer life (*e.g.*, Calvin’s Geneva), and consequently established separate groups and societies. In many of these, Old Testament Laws were the basis for civil order -- church and state being effectively one, as pre-Babylonian Israel had been. Some of these societies were quite harsh, especially by contemporary standards. The Christendom notion went with settlers to new lands, where similar communities were established, but none survived intact. Ultimately, Christendom collapsed under the weight of both secularism and nationalism. As Christianity emerged from these Constantinian roots, Christians also found themselves relieved of the burden of maintaining custodianship of the socio-religious obligations of the *corpus Christianum*.

In short, we are free, insofar as we are courageous enough to undertake it, to contemplate and to enact in concrete ways the only biblically and theologically sound reason we have for calling ourselves Christians -- which is to say our confession of Jesus as the Christ. As long as Christianity had to play -- or allowed itself to play -- the role of Western culture-religion, the nomenclature ‘Christian’ was obliged to stand for all sorts of dispositions extraneous or tangential in relation to biblical faith (Hall, 1999).

In some European countries, the process of disestablishment has been slow. In the UK, for instance, the Anglican Church remains the state religion, headed by the monarch of England. The Anglican Church is, like the monarch, little more than a ceremonious

entity, and Christianity is anaemic at best. While most in the UK consider themselves Anglican, fewer than 4% actually attend services. Attendance figures are comparable in New Zealand, Australia and elsewhere -- other lands where Western Christendom was practiced. Compare this to the United States, however, where church and state were constitutionally disestablished, or separate early on. Today nearly 50% of all who claim to be adherents of the faith actually *do* attend church regularly. Instead of having a friendly relationship with the state, the church in the US has an often-tense relationship, which seems to contribute to internal strength.

In Russia, we have a different dynamic. Here, church and state existed in close relationship for a thousand years. With the coming of the Communists c.1917, the Orthodox Church was violently dis-established and forced underground for seventy-odd years. The Orthodox Church fought to regain its stature in Russian society following the collapse of the Soviet Union (c.1990), and has proven to be amazingly resilient. As Russians re-embrace their history, many are also re-embracing the traditional Orthodox faith. While contemporary Russia is a secular state, the Russian Orthodox Church has regained considerable social influence, even within government.

Corpus Privatus or Publicas?

Lesslie Newbigin believed the *corpus Christianum*, or Christendom, was a great blessing to the world: but certainly not all blessing. He believed the church needed to learn to live privately and publicly, to “embody Christ over all life -- its political and economic, no less than its personal and domestic morals -- yet, without falling into the Constantinian trap” (*ibid.* 102). Since the time of the early church, Christians have wrestled with their proper role in society. Should the church primarily pursue a role as *corpus privatus* (private church), or *corpus publicas* (public church)? To be sure, in many instances the church is not in a position to choose what place it will hold in larger

society. State authorities quite often make such decisions for them. In free societies, however, the church does often have a measure of choice.

For Newbigin, the church should attempt to attain neither extreme -- the *corpus privatus*, or the *corpus publicus*. The church needs to live as Christ lived, speaking the truth in love, living holistically and balanced. Christians “can never seek refuge in a ghetto where their faith is not proclaimed as public truth for all... the church can never cease to remind governments that they are under the rule of Christ and that he alone is the judge of all they do” (Newbigin, 1986:115). Newbigin said further:

that the church is the bearer to all the nations of a gospel that announces the kingdom, the reign, and the sovereignty of God. It calls men and women to repent of their false loyalty to other powers, to become believers in the one true sovereignty, and so to become corporately a sign, instrument, and foretaste of that sovereignty of the one true and living God over all nature, all nations, and all human lives. It is not meant to call men and women out of the world into a safe religious enclave, but to call them out in order to send them back as agents of God’s kingdomship (Newbigin, 1986:124).

Retreat from the challenges of postmodernity are tempting, but should not be the preferred course for the church. Even where conflict, strife and persecution exist, God’s people must persevere in the strength and grace of God, to maintain as best they can, a faithful witness. There are certainly times when God’s people need to retreat, to be cautious, and to live to fight another day, so to speak. Yet, God’s own are called to boldly share His love and truth with those lost in darkness.

Territorial Christianity

Significant to Christendom was the inherent notion that Western Christianity was superior to all others -- an arrogance the postmoderns are right to challenge. In fact, Western Christianity has never been the 'paramount' expression of the faith. The Orthodox streams of the faith have always been vibrant, but have habitually been less important to Western historians, whose works are always more widely read. Western Christianity became the primary religion of the Occidental world, while Eastern, or Orthodox Christianity, made a huge impact within Oriental cultures, but never seemed able to make lasting inroads where other major religions were well established. As Western Christianity expanded, it rarely had to contend with major religions, more often challenged by tribal [animistic] cultures, which have traditionally been more receptive to Christianity than the higher ordered religions.

Along with the Western Christian sense of supposed superiority, came the notion of territoriality. "The Christendom idea, the territorial principle of Christianity, latched to the idea of a single inherited civilization, was brought into Christian history by the 'barbarian' model of Christianity, much as the Hellenistic model of Christianity had introduced the principle of orthodoxy. Both were the natural outcome of the interaction of Christian faith and tradition with the dominant cultural norms" (Walls, 2002:36). The Roman Catholic Church embraced the territorial nature of Christendom and consequently remained resilient to external cultural challenges. "To be Christian was also to belong to a specific territory -- Christian lands, the entire continuous lands from Ireland to the Carpathians, states and peoples subject to Christ, hearing the voice of Christ's Apostle from the Eternal City that attenuated them all" (Walls, 2002:37). Thus, the world was divided into 'Christendom' and 'heathendom.' This reached a misguided and ugly pinnacle during the Crusades.

As Bosch (1991) discusses in various places, Christian mission was often entangled with the notion of spreading Western culture, and in the fulfilment of manifest destiny. 'Mission' has also for years been inter-twined with the modernist notion of 'progress.'

“The subtle assumption of Western mission was that the church’s missionary mandate lay not only in forming the church of Jesus Christ, but in shaping the Christian communities that it birthed in the image of the church of Western European culture” (Guder, 1998:4).

This attitude of Western intellectual superiority had its roots in the ideas of progress and ‘manifest destiny’ in which both Christianity and science worked together to contribute to the betterment of the world morally and materially... In many parts of the world, Christianity became equated with Western civilization and commerce, and the reshaping of the entire world in the image of ‘modernity’ was seen as a forgone conclusion (Hiebert, 1999:25).

Westerners have sometimes tragically disrespected indigenous cultures, ranging from Native Americans, to Australian Aboriginals, to Africans, Latin Americans, Chinese and more. Still fresh in the minds of millions of people, are the mixed consequences of Western Imperialism. While Western nations brought technological advancements (medicines, *etc.*) and the gospel to millions, they also left a sordid history of exploitation, greed and abuse. Professor Walls provides this invaluable insight:

Colonialism, in fact, helped to transform the Christian position in the world by forcing a distinction between Christianity and Christendom. Colonial experience undermined the identification of Christianity with territory and immobilized the idea of crusade.... it is the colonial period that marks the divergence of interest between Christianity and the Western power, the separation of the religion of the West from its political and economic interests. If several generations of missionaries once felt betrayed when a state nominally Christian refused to offer the support they felt due, we now may be humbly grateful that God is kinder than to answer all the prayers of his people... colonialism helped to ensure that new Christendoms did not arise. The pattern of colonial rule prevented the development of the relationship of throne and altar that developed in the northern lands.

The nearest approach to a new Christendom has come in some Pacific island communities -- Samoa, Tonga, Fiji -- where entire populations with their rulers moved towards Christianity during the nineteenth century and where until quite recently a single church predominated in each state (Walls, 2002:44).

The missional enterprise was often conducted in cooperation with other Colonial ventures, in an interesting and complicated relationship. Quite often Colonial missionaries lived in separate camps and visited the local people. Not too many years ago, the thought of living among the 'natives' was considered revolutionary. In recent decades, a new humility has inculcated a sense of commonality between the messengers and the receivers. Missionary vulnerability has in many ways replaced the errors of their predecessors.

We have preached the gospel from the point of view of the wealthy man who casts a mite into the lap of a beggar, rather than from the point of view of the husbandman who casts his seed into the earth, knowing that his own life and the lives of all connected with him depend upon the crop which will result from his labor (Ronald Allen, in Bevans, 1994:83).

Postmodernism is in part, of course, a reaction against the ingrained *hubris* within Western civilization. Along with this, however, some postmoderns criticize the church for embracing the same modernist arrogance. The church routinely defends itself against postmodern attacks, yet seems unable to comprehend how deeply infected it has become with modernist thought. Even the cautions of caring non-Western brethren are brushed aside, because the pride of the Western church is so pervasive.

The postmodern challenge to Western Christian cultural hegemony has also helped to uncover another ugly trait of Christendom, the determination to control, not influence. Sharing Christ with the nations (*ethnos*, Greek) means being 'influencers,' not 'controllers.' If any one is to 'control,' it is God in His sovereignty, not us. We are to be vessels in and through which God makes Himself known. We are witnesses, who proactively seek to influence others, hence the concept of *Missio Dei* -- we participate in what God is doing.

The church should instead take a Christo and Theo-centric gospel to the nations, a mission-driven witness where God's own come "not as judges or lawyers, but as witnesses; not as soldiers, but as envoys of peace; not as high-pressure sales-persons, but as ambassadors of the Servant Lord" (Bosch, 2000:489). Christianity is unquestionably far bigger than Western Christianity. As African theologian John Mbiti suggests, "Christianity is supra-cultural... it transcends all cultures. Unless our cultures see this beyondness of Christianity, it will fail to command sufficient authority and allegiance over our peoples to enable them to yield unreservedly to its transforming grace" (Mbiti 1973:92). Prof. Walls adds:

Every phase of Christian history has seen a transformation of Christianity as it has entered and penetrated another culture. There is no such thing as "Christian culture" or "Christian civilization" in the sense that there is an Islamic culture, and an Islamic civilization. There have been several different Christian civilizations already; there may be many more. The reason for this lies in the infinite translatability of the Christian faith (Walls, 2000:22).

The faith is both 'translated' and 'incarnated' -- both verbalized and manifested. It is trans-local and trans-cultural; it is movement, not static. The faith began in Hebraic cultural soil. It continues to be re-planted in new cultural soils. In these new soils, it becomes another expression of the faith once given by the Apostles. At times, the faith has been taken -- like a big, mature potted plant -- and given to other cultures. Its roots eventually went into native soil, but it remained primarily a foreign plant. Ideally, what we must do is take the 'seed' of the Gospel, and plant it in new soil, letting it spring forth and flourish as an indigenous plant. Thus, it is always the same faith -- rooted in Jesus Christ -- but as many different cultural expressions. David Bosch defines mission as:

God's self-revelation as the One who loves the world. God's involvement in and with the world, the nature and activity of God, which embraces both church and the world, and in which the church is privileged to participate. *Missio Dei* enunciates the good news that God is a God-for-people (Bosch, 2000:10).

Stuart Murray on Post-Christendom

Stuart Murray Williams, who uses the pen name, Stuart Murray, has made the term, 'Post-Christendom,' something of a 'buzz-word' in recent years, especially among those interested in the current state of Christianity in the West. Murray says that post-Christendom "is the culture that emerges as the Christian faith loses coherence within a society that has been definitively shaped by the Christian story and as the institutions that have been developed to express Christian convictions decline in influence" (Murray, 2002:19). In post-Christendom, the church has moved from the cultural centre to its margins. The church is no longer the dominant settler, but is once again sojourners. The church moves from a place of privilege to plurality; from control to witness and influence; from maintenance to missional. In this cultural marginalisation process, postmoderns are very happy to assist.

As Stuart Murray says in his work, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World* (2004. Cumbria, GA: Paternoster Press), the faith is not gone from Europe. Rather, the protective veneer has been exposed, revealing an anaemic faith that is more cultural apparition than dynamic faith expression and practice. All across the Western world and even into post-Soviet Russia are millions who identify themselves as 'Christian,' but have little more than an institutional relationship with the church.

European Christendom produced a socio-religious, or Christian veneer, that left only a remnant with a real commitment to Christ. Again, to emphasize, in the UK (c.2006), over 25 million people claim allegiance to the Anglican faith, but only about 4% actually ever attend church. There are now more practicing Anglicans in Nigeria, than in the United States, Australia and Canada combined. African Anglicans are, overall, more conservative than their Western brethren. In many Western nations, ignorance of Christianity is increasing, while interest in postmodern 'spirituality' increases. A residual cultural Christianization will persist for years to come.

Murray has identified a number of characteristics that help distinguish Christendom cultural patterns from contemporary cultural dynamics now emerging in the post-

Christendom West. For example in Christendom, the (1) clergy played an important social function, marrying and burying family members and were widely respected throughout society. That has changed drastically, where today clergy are far less important and central. In Christendom (2) one's religion had to do with where one was born, its territorial nature. The (3) 'sacral society' developed a social environment where there was little difference between the sacred and secular. Orthodoxy was (4) determined by socially powerful clerics, who were (5) state supported. So-called Christian moral standards were (6) imposed upon society at large, even though some of these standards were nowhere to be found in Scripture, or were rooted in the harshness of Old Testament Law.

Further, Christianity was (7) defended by state powers, where immorality, heresy and schism were common crimes against the church-state. The Inquisition is an example of how this relationship can so quickly go astray. Warfare (8) often extended the rule of Christ, as it were, to disobedient regions, or to extend Christian territories. Church hierarchy (9) was modelled after Roman government, was state supported and state protected. The (10) division of clergy and laity eventually went far beyond the prescriptions of Scripture, giving clergy an enormously over-elevated stature and far too much unchecked power. The period of the Reform Popes (1049-1085) is a classic example of this. Church attendance (11) was compulsory, with penalties for non-compliance. Infant baptism (12) was obligatory, an ordinance of entrance into the faith and Christian society, and (13) tithes were obligatory as well.

By contrast, the post-Christendom Christian churches are comprised of voluntary membership. Baptism, by whatever form, signifies coming into the church alone, not the state, as was always the custom in pre-Constantinian Christianity. There is also an ideological and praxiological differentiation between 'world' and 'church,' where secular and sacred are more practically maintained. Mission and evangelism are no longer matters of military conquest, but of participating in *Missio Dei*, God's mission to redeem the lost (*cf.*, 2Co. 5:17-21).

Gradually the notion that other religions could exist within Christian lands was accepted. No longer were there harsh penalties, and/or violence toward those of other

religions, eventually making possible the religious pluralism present in the West today. Eschatology has turned from a mostly earthly manifestation (*cf.*, postmillennialism) to a spiritual, heavenly hope (*cf.*, Heb. 12). The church and its clergy become increasingly less central to societal functions. State magistrates and others, for example, could conduct weddings and funerals. These public services were no longer only the domain of the church. Social order became more a matter of being a good citizen than commitment to the church. The church became more focused on morally influencing society, than in controlling and ordering society as a whole. Church discipline and courts became an internal, not society-wide, matter. Yet, there is still considerable confusion about how to apply and endorse a Christian moral standard.

Murray also notes these changes as Christianity is further disestablished in Western society: the church moves socially from (a) the centre to margins; from (b) majority to minority; from being (c) settlers to sojourners; from (d) privileged, to one among many (plurality); from (e) dominant and controlling, to marginalised and influencing; and from (f) maintenance and ecclesio-centricity, to mission and movement orientation (Murray, May 2004). Murray also says that it is important to note that “Post-Christendom is not the experience of all Christians. It is the experience of Christians in Western Europe and other societies with roots in this culture” (Murray, May 2004).

Even as Murray (who lives in the UK) speaks to all this, it is also important to note that the disestablishment of the official Anglican state church in the United Kingdom has not yet happened. There is a growing wave of sentiment for the disestablishment of the church, but there also continues to be staunch resistance, especially within the church and the government -- the power of tradition to avoid change. Those who resist disestablishment fear the complete demise of Anglicanism. On one hand, it can be argued that Anglicanism in the UK has lasted as long as it has only because it continues to be state funded and supported. It can also be argued that the church is stronger where separation is maintained between church and state, as in the US, for example. State supported churches simply are not strong, healthy organisations that produce great internal vitality. Ancient Israel up to the Exilic period is a perfect example of this. Much like a child who never separates from protective parents, the UK churches in general, do

not know what it means to be independent, or self-supporting, which is one of the most basic ways Missiologists identify healthy churches around the world.

I am still not convinced that the use of “post-Christian” is the best way to describe Christianity in the West -- something Murray agrees with -- especially when compared to terms like ‘post-Christendom,’ ‘de-Christianization,’ or Christian socio-political dis-establishment. To my mind, ‘post-Christian’ refers more accurately to a place like Laodicea in Asia Minor, where the church once was, but no longer is. Contemporary Turkey, for example, is less than 1% Christian, but was once a region where the church prospered. Many Western nations are less culturally ‘Christianized’ than they have been for a long time, but they are not devoid of faith adherents, and therefore cannot accurately be described as ‘post-Christian.’ It may seem like semantics, but it is an important Missiological distinction. The church should be a dynamic organisation, as is its nature as movement, again: *Ecclesia reformata secundum verbi Dei semper reformada* -- “the church once reformed is always in the process of being reformed according to the Word of God” (Guder, 2000:150). David Bosch adds:

The church is itself an object of the *Missio Dei*, in constant need of repentance and conversion; indeed, all traditions today subscribe to the adage *ecclesia semper reformada est*. The cross which the church proclaims also judges the church and censures every manifestation of complacency about its ‘achievements’ (Bosch, 2000:387).

Lack of Purpose

Christendom could never properly place Christ at the centre of all things, because it was always distracted by state interests and its own carnal weaknesses; much like pre-Exilic Israel. The decline of the faith in the West can be directly attributed to Christianity’s compromise with the prevailing culture, especially so as to have peace with

it: thus, the ongoing siren call of the postmoderns toward ‘tolerance,’ not truth. When Christianity ceases to be counter-cultural and committed to its foundations, it begins to embrace the surrounding culture, attempting to please it, rather than prophetically challenge it. Christianity in much of the West has lost its sense of purpose, or *raison d'etre*. A church at peace with its surroundings has lost its antithetical position, preferring comfort and compromise, whose heart has become apathetic. “The church remains socially and salvifically relevant only as long as it is in tension with culture” (Hunsberger, 1996:78; *cf.*, Mat. 10:34-39).

Another clear signal that Western Christianity has lost its direction and first love (*cf.*, Rev. 2:4f) is that for many Christian scholars in the West, theologizing has become an almost endless rehashing of the past -- rather than engagement with present and future challenges. The mainline churches do not seem to know what to do about their decline, neither are they willing to make the changes necessary to bring true and lasting change about -- so deep is their compromise with culture. Andrew F. Walls says that proper theologizing is occasional and local in character. Any organization that is self-consumed and backwards looking, is an organization in decline. Forward-looking, progressive, and proactive organizations need to be cognizant of history, but must not be stuck in the past. It is a historiographic truism that one moves forward best with an understanding of the failures of the past, yet not living in the past. African theologian John Mbiti wisely observes:

It is utterly scandalous for so many Christian scholars in [the] old Christendom to know so much about heretical movements in the second and third centuries, when so few of them know anything about Christian movements in areas of the younger churches (John Mbiti, in Jenkins, 2002:4).

Christians in the non-Western world do not often have time to ponder the theological minutia their Western peers do. The often harsh realities of life in the Two-Thirds World (*e.g.*, poverty, AIDS, natural disasters) means that theologizing done there has little place for “the barren, sterile, time-wasting by-paths into which so much Western theology and research has gone in recent years. Theology in the Third World will be, as theology at all

creative times has been, about doing things, about things that deeply affect the lives of numbers of people” (Bevans, 1999:24).

The underlying problem of the mainline churches cannot be solved by new programs of church development alone. That problem is the weakening of the spiritual conviction required to generate the enthusiasm and energy needed to sustain a vigorous communal life. Somehow, in the course of the past century, these churches lost the will or the ability to teach the Christian faith and what it requires to a succession of younger cohorts in such a way as to command their allegiance (Hoge, 1993).

The Western churches do not realize -- or seem to care -- how deeply they have drunk from the well of modernity and postmodernity. South African David Bosch says: “There is a profound feeling of ambiguity about Western technology and development, indeed about the very idea of progress itself. Progress, the god of the Enlightenment, proved to be a false god after all” (Bosch, 2000:188). Bosch continues:

The foundational Enlightenment belief in the assured victory of progress was perhaps more explicitly recognizable in the Christian missionary enterprise than any other element of the age. There was a widespread and practically unchallengeable confidence in the ability of Western Christians to offer a cure-all for the ills of the world and guarantee progress to all -- whether through the spread of ‘knowledge’ or of “the gospel.” The gradual secularization of the idea of the millennium... turned out to be one of the most sustained manifestations of the doctrine of progress (Bosch, 1991:343).

Christianity is meant to be a movement, driven by a central passion -- our love and appreciation for Christ. When the church ceases to be and do what it was purposed, it becomes self-consumed and ineffective, little different from the world, and of little real use to anyone. “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavour, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men” (Mat. 5:13). No organisation can long last without knowing who and what it is; and

that lack of purpose in much of Western Christianity is obvious. Love of the flesh has replaced the love and fear of God. The Apostle John cautions:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world -- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life -- is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever (1Jn. 2:15-17).

Much of the Western church is more afraid of men, than God. When modern critics have barked, the church has invariably bowed and retreated. Where there is no proper fear of God, there is no respect, no discipline, no vision, and no proper order in relationships. This is as true in families, as it is regarding individual and corporate relationships with God. “You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are all around you; for the Lord your God is a jealous God among you, lest the anger of the Lord your God be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth” (Deu. 6:13-15; *cf.*, Exo. 20:20; Lev. 19:14; 25:17; Deu. 4:10; 5:29; 6:2; Mat. 10:28).

Why should we obey and faithfully follow and serve the Lord? Because, as Moses says clearly for all generations of those who know and fear the Lord: it is for our own good and for His glory. “And the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day” (Deu. 6:24). Our own good, and the abundance of God’s blessings are sometimes apparent *via* material wealth; but God’s blessings are also apparent in sound minds and bodies, healthy relationships, peace with our neighbours, and others.

True wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord. When the puny wisdom of mere arrogant men is allowed to dominate in the church, inevitably fear will reign instead of faith, because what can men do compared to God (*cf.*, Luk. 18:27)? Men believe their thoughts superior to all others; they foolishly believe they can accomplish great things without God’s guidance and help. “All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirits. Commit your works to the Lord, and your thoughts will be established” (Pro. 16:2-3; *cf.*, Psa. 49).

Ours is not a faith rooted in irrationality, nor is it a faith dominated by human rationality. Ours is a faith that has been evidentially tested and proven in response to our own doubts and those of our critics -- and still it is faith. The task of the believer is not to prove the historical veracity of Christ and Scripture, as valuable as these things are. Our [primary] task is to be disciples and witnesses. When we take more upon ourselves than is given us -- namely bringing others to faith in Christ -- we are sure to make mistakes, and fall into traps, such as attempting to satisfy the insatiable carnal doubts of men, apart from the mental and spiritual illumination only the Spirit of God can provide. Truly, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Pro. 1:7).

The Anglican Rift

Perhaps no other contemporary situation exposes the postmodern, post-colonial and post-Christendom tensions within and proximate to Western Christianity, than the rift within global Anglicanism. The problems within the Anglican community truly reveal how great the gap between the culturally compromised Western, mainline groups and those still faithful to Christ, who are increasingly from the non-Western world. It also clearly reveals how great the reach of the cultural trends and dynamics affecting the Western world, church and far beyond.

The story of African Christianity is fascinating, wonderful and extremely encouraging. “The expansion of Christianity in Twentieth-century Africa has been so dramatic that it has been called ‘the fourth great age of Christian expansion’” (Isichei, 1995:1). The continent is historically connected to the very earliest days of *Yahweh*’s interactions with the children of Israel, Jesus (Mat. 27:32) and the early church (Act 8:26–29). Some of the most influential Christians in history came from Africa (*e.g.*, Augustine, Clement, Cyprian). There are now more Anglicans, for example, in Nigeria than in the United

States, Australia and Canada combined. More Ugandans attend church yearly than in the United Kingdom, even though more than 25 million in the UK identify themselves as Anglican (Isichei, 1995:1). Continental Africa has grown from some 9 million Christian adherents c.1900, to nearly 400 million today. Put another way, about 9.2% of the total population were Christian c.1900, but today some 46.5% of the total. Several studies suggest that if current growth trends continue, African Christianity could approach 600 million adherents by 2025.

The current rift within global Anglicanism has been swelling for years, largely a clash between Conservative non-Westerners and Liberal Westerners. Tensions swelled enormously following the 2003 consecration of practicing homosexual Gene Robinson to Bishop of New Hampshire (USA). Canadian Anglicans, under Archbishop Andrew Hutchison, sided with the EC-USA, affirming the “integrity and sanctity of committed adult same-sex relationships” (LeBlanc). Nigerian Archbishop Peter Jasper Akinola, Henry Luke Orombi and others stand fully opposed to this apostasy, and are openly critical of their Western counterparts.

In routine meetings that occurred shortly after Robinson’s consecration, Akinola and about a dozen other Anglican primates refused to participate in the joint Eucharist, meant as a show of Anglican unity and toleration. Bishop Akinola said “unity of doctrine preceded unity of worship” (LeBlanc). Some Liberal Westerners consequently called for the excommunication of Archbishop Akinola, because he challenged the traditional authority of the Archbishop of Canterbury -- who has no formal authority outside the UK. In Anglicanism, the Archbishop of Canterbury is considered the *primus inter pares*, or first among equals. The stand Bishop Akinola took was supported by many around the world. This is another indication that the long Western hegemony over global Christianity is coming to an end. Hence, as Archbishop Akinola said: “We do not have to go through Canterbury to get to Jesus” (LeBlanc).

Bishop Akinola has worked faithfully inside the Anglican Church for years attempting to bring unity and orthodoxy; but obviously to no avail. Dozens of US churches have asked for ‘alternative oversight,’ and two of the nation’s largest and wealthiest Episcopal congregations, Truro Church and The Falls Church, both located in the Virginia suburbs

of Washington, D.C., have now done the same, asking to come under the oversight of the Anglican province headed by Akinola. Archbishop Akinola began pushing for a more independent Nigerian church increasingly distanced from those he and his fellow Africans believe are apostate, yet gladly welcome all who seek to faithfully follow Christ with him.

The African primates know that money from the West has been crucial to their existence, but are determined not to sacrifice integrity for money. They would rather suffer financial strain for a while, than compromise the integrity of the faith. Akinola and the other African primates now encourage their African brethren to stand united, depending on God to supply their needs, not the heterodox Westerners. They believe the present crisis signals that it is time to stop depending on the West, to begin trusting God as never before, to see Him establish a strong indigenous African church.

Rwandan Bishop John Rucyahana of the Diocese of Shyira said, “To be honest, there is not enough money for the needs we have in Rwanda after the [1994] genocide, but if money is being used to disgrace the Gospel, then we don’t need it” (Duin). The Anglicans of Uganda report a similar situation, adding that the conservative American churches have partially filled the void created when the Africans refused funds from the Liberal churches. “Bill Atwood, general secretary of Ekklesia Society, an international Anglican network, just returned from a tour of Tanzania, Malawi, Kenya, South Africa and Uganda and called the lack of money for Africans ‘scandalous’” (Duin). Independent reports attest to the fact that African Anglicans are literally starving to death, rather than accept funds from heterodox Anglican groups. Rwandan and Tanzanian bishops will apparently soon join with the Anglican archbishops of Nigeria, Kenya and Uganda -- who alone oversee more than 30 million adherents to the faith. At last years African primates meeting, the archbishop of Congo told his fellow primates that his people were starving, many eating as little as one meal per day.

Western Anglicans have tens of millions of dollars in available funds, but the Africans are more determined than ever to stay the course. Kenyan Archbishop Benjamin Nzimbi said recently, in effect, that he and his people would rather starve to death than compromise the integrity of the Christian faith as the Western church has done.

November 2004 the Kenyan primate refused the remaining \$100,000 of a total \$288,980 grant for theological education given in 2002 by Trinity Episcopal Seminary. “We are not to mortgage our faith,” Nzimbi said. “We do regret the money lost, but we rejoice on our stand for the Gospel and the truth” (Duin).

In addition, the Archbishop of Nigeria (Akinola) encouraged the development of independent African theological institutions, further distancing faithful Africans from apostate Western groups. During the first ever all-African Anglican bishops meeting held in Lagos, Nigeria (Oct. 2004), all in attendance agreed to the new initiative. “The time has come for the church in Africa to address the pitfalls in our present theological and Western worldview education, which has failed to relate with some of the socio-political and economic challenges and Christian faith in Africa,” their communiqué said. “We need well-resourced, highly rated and contextually relevant theological institutions that can engage intelligently with our peculiar challenges from an African perspective” (LeBlanc). Africans often cite Amos 3:3 -- “Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?”

The Anglican Church of Uganda issued a position paper in May 2005 entitled: *Position Paper on Scripture, Authority, and Human Sexuality*. The Ugandan’s [rightly] lay full blame for the Anglican crisis on the West. The Ugandan’s further believe there is a crisis of authority concerning The Archbishop of Canterbury, The Lambeth Conference of Bishops, The Primates Meeting and the Anglican Consultative Council, who will not deal with the crisis precipitated by the EC-USA and the Canadians. They believe false teachers, according to Acts 20:29-30, have divided the church and now scandalize her before the world.

We in the Church of Uganda are convinced that the Authority of Scripture must be reasserted as the central authority in the Anglican Communion. From our point of view, the basis of our commitment to the Anglican Communion is that it provides a wider forum for holding each other accountable to the Scriptures, which are the seed of faith and the foundation of the Church in Uganda. The Church of Uganda, therefore, upholds Resolution 1.10 of Lambeth 1998 that

says, “Homosexual practice is incompatible with Scripture,” and calls upon all in the Communion in general and the ACC meeting in Nottingham in particular to likewise affirm it. The Church of Uganda recognizes that the schismatic and heretical actions of ECUSA and the Anglican Church of Canada maintains its stand of ‘broken communion’ with them, and challenges those provinces that subscribe to the authority of scripture to do likewise, for the sake of Gospel and God’s Church. The Church of Uganda is committed to maintaining fellowship, support and communion with clergy and parishes in these provinces who seek to uphold biblical orthodoxy and ‘the faith once delivered to the saints’ (Church of Uganda).

The Anglican Church of Tanzania was equally firm on the matter, stating that they also reject homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture. The African Anglicans are hardly alone in their stand, as thousands of Western Anglicans now publicly stand with them, and rather expect them to take the bold orthodox public stands that few others will. The Anglican Church of South East Asia also stands with the faithful Africans. In addition to a November 24, 2003 declaration from the Office of the Archbishop of the Province of the Anglican Church in South East Asia, came a June 2005 press release highlighting the particular crisis their churches face living among large Muslim and Buddhist populations, who themselves consider Western Christians a mockery of biblical teachings.

This is not an overstatement or an exaggeration of the situation there. In a region that is dominated by Muslims and Buddhists, both of whom are exceptionally conservative and parochial on matters of human sexuality and religion, Christianity which is perceived as a religion of the Westerners, has been subjected to embarrassment and ridicule. In the eyes of the non-religionists who are morally serious because of traditional communal and family values *e.g.* Confucianists *etc.*, we are degraded.

We are discredited even in the eyes of many governments in our region, not only the Islamic government in Malaysia and Indonesia but also the Singapore government, when the Church expresses herself in areas of social and moral ethics and values. Christian churches of the other denominations feel it unfair that they have been tarred with the same brush as that for the Anglican Church. They are also embarrassed by what is shamelessly practiced by the Church in the North American provinces.

Who suffers? The evangelization and mission of all the churches in our region suffer. The Anglican Church which has the responsibility to evangelize 400 million people in the nine nations of the province, are the primary sufferers. Our members are at pains to understand the actions of ECUSA and Canada. We cannot defend the actions because those actions are blatantly in violation of the Holy Scripture. Not to defend the actions or to even rationalize them begs the question why we should remain in communion with the churches in ECUSA and the Anglican Church of Canada.

The power of the gospel to change and transform lives is the essential part of our faith. This power of the Gospel gives hope and life to the masses in South East Asia who have been disillusioned by the other traditional religions of the land. The innovative teaching prevailing in the West is contradicting the true teachings as revealed in the Bible. Such teachings present a totally different 'gospel' and directly undermine the very basis and foundations of our reason to share the Gospel. They are offensive not only to our Bible believing brethren but to all the other faith Communities (Church of South East Asia).

Predictably, Western Anglican Church leaders responded, attempting to justify their own twisted position and tried to discredit their own denominational brethren -- saying

the position held by the non-Western church leaders is rooted in inferior cultural practices. So arrogant men like these spout: “God is dead! Man will decide his own destiny -- what is wrong and what is right. The fools who believe in religious myths only labour to undermine the freedoms given by the Enlightenment. Glory to the Goddess Sophia! Man must walk in the ‘light’ of rationality, not the darkness of myth and superstition. Hardly a wonder that the un-enlightened still take stock of mythical texts! Oh foolish man, indeed! Join us in ruling the world, for we are gods!” Yet, the true and living God responds:

Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be
 Envious of the workers of iniquity. For they
 shall soon be cut down like the grass, and
 wither as the green herb. Trust in the LORD,
 and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on
 His faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the
 LORD, and He shall give you the desires of
 your heart... For yet a little while and the
 wicked shall be no more; indeed, you will
 look carefully for his place, but it shall be no
 more. But the meek shall inherit the earth,
 and shall delight themselves in then
 abundance of peace. The wicked plots
 against the just, and gnashes at him with his
 teeth. The Lord laughs at him, for He sees
 that his day is coming (Psa. 37:1-4; 10-13).

Archbishop Akinola and those who stand with him have done precisely what the Lord requires in Matthew 18. When people bring offences into the church they must be challenged, which is precisely what the Nigerian primate has done. Where the faithful church stands in agreement on these matters, the Lord stands with them (Mat. 18:18-19). Our non-Western brethren are taking a stand for Christ and paying a very real price for doing so.

I cannot add to, or improve upon the position my Two-Thirds World brethren have taken. I stand with them in acknowledging our inherent carnal weaknesses, and our constant need for humility before a holy God who is both just and gracious, but never the fool. Even as God sent the prophets to warn the apostate leaders of Israel, so has He been sending prophets to the culture-compromised leaders within Western Christianity, telling

them precisely what He told others before them.

Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter
The sheep of My pasture!” says the Lord.
Therefore thus says the Lord God of Israel
against the shepherds who feed My people:
“You have scattered My flock, driven them
away, and not attended to them. Behold, I
will attend to you for the evil of your doings,”
says the Lord. “But I will gather the remnant
of My flock out of all countries where I have
driven them, and bring them back to their
folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase.
“I will set up shepherds over them who will
feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor
be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking,” says
the LORD (Jer. 23:1-4).

Chapter VII

Postmodern Spirituality

The trait of the postmodern cultural wave that fascinates me the most is the resurgence of spirituality and animism in the West -- though it is really nothing new at all. The pre-Christian West was rooted in animism, much like the rest of the world. With the coming of Judaism and Christianity, animism gave way, but certainly never disappeared: more often, it went ‘underground.’ With the Enlightenment came new intellectual freedoms, and a resurgence of animism. Then, with postmodernity came an even more substantial resurgence, or renaissance of paganism -- animism given fresh license to flourish. “For the first time in centuries, the biblical condemnation of the worship of Baal and Ashtaroth is beginning to have direct reference to contemporary culture” (Lovelace, in Montgomery, 1976:86).

Across early Medieval Christendom, came the warring and migratory influx of barbarians from other European regions -- Ireland, Scandinavia, and Germany -- and with them, a fresh surge of animism. Rooted in the barbarian worldview were things like elves, giants, fairies, goblins, gnomes, ogres, banshees, dragons, vampires and more. “Dead men walked the air as ghosts; men who had sold themselves to the Devil roamed woods and fields as werewolves; the souls of children dead before baptism haunted the marshes as will-o’-the-wisps” (Durant, 1950:984).

People of the period wore all manner of objects to ward off evil and devils and bring good luck (*e.g.*, rings, amulets, gems). Numbers had great significance. Three was the holiest number, representing the Holy Trinity of the Godhead; seven represented complete man and his seven most deadly sins. A sneeze could be a bad omen and was believed disarmed by a ‘God bless you.’ The Church condemned and punished such practices, by a graduation of penances, but they continued virtually unabated. The Church especially denounced ‘black magic’ which resorted to demons to obtain command

over people and events. “Nearly everybody believed in some magical means of turning the power of supernatural beings to a desired end” (Durant, 1950:985). Many people thought that making the sign of the cross, or using holy water and the sacraments were equal to magical rites, and medicine and magic were nearly equal.

Science and philosophy, in the medieval West, had to grow up in such an atmosphere of myth, legend, miracle, omens, demons, prodigies, magic, astrology, divination, and sorcery as comes only in ages of chaos and fear. All these had existed in the pagan world, and exist today, but tempered by a civilized humor and enlightenment (Durant, 1950:984).

Such was Medieval Europe, where belief in witchcraft was nearly universal. All manner of beliefs and laws concerning witches existed. “The Church was at first lenient with these popular beliefs, looking upon them as pagan survivals that would die out; on the contrary they grew and spread; and in 1298 the Inquisition began its campaign to suppress witchcraft by burning women at the stake” (Durant, 1950:986). Though rational and Christian notions gradually suppressed and replaced these deep-rooted beliefs that dominated Europe, the transition took centuries.

Amid famines, plagues, and wars, in the chaos of a fugitive or divided papacy, men and women sought in occult forces some explanation for the unintelligible miseries of mankind, some magical power to control events, some mystical escape from a harsh reality; and the life of reason moved precariously in a milieu of sorcery, witchcraft, necromancy, palmistry, phrenology, numerology, divination, portents, prophecies, dream interpretations, fateful stellar conjunctions, chemical transmutations, miraculous cures, and occult power in animals, minerals, and plants. All these marvels remain deathless with us today, and one or another wins from almost every one of us some open or secret allegiance; but their present influence in Europe falls far short of their medieval sway (Durant, 1957: 230).

With the dawn of the Enlightenment, a fresh urgency toward rationalism arose. The church worked with the humanists to remove myth and (animistic) superstition from Western life, a relationship that interestingly would re-fashion Christianity, and encourage widespread resistance to the ‘supernatural’ Gospel, even within the Church. “For so long, spiritual and religious thought were disparaged as archaic and intellectually primitive” (Clifford, 2003:2). The efforts to remove animistic beliefs and practices were less successful than hoped, more often suppressing, rather than removing them. “Many books were written in this age against superstition, and all contained superstitions” (Durant, 1957:233). Even the great Reformer, Martin Luther, was typical of the time, believing “in goblins, witches, demons, the curative value of live toads, and the impish incubi who sought out maidens in their baths or beds and startled them into motherhood” (Durant, 1957:420).

By 1700, somewhere between thirty thousand and several millions of witches had been tried and executed. The Reformation, however, launched a biblical attack on magical elements in contemporary Christian practice, and on the occult world outside the church, which began to restrain the world of superstition... Peter Gay, who contends that the Enlightenment itself was a neo-Pagan revival, notes that in the left wing of the movement, among libertines such as the Marquis de Sade, sexual magic and a semi-serious demonolatry were practiced in places like the Hellfire Caves of France and England (Lovelace, in Montgomery, 1976:80).

Folk religions carried on in alchemy, astrology and magic, often variously blended with Judaism, Islam or Christianity. The *Kabala*, a Jewish mysticism, became very popular. The *Hermetica* was rediscovered during the Renaissance. Attributed to the ancient mythic figure Hermes Trismegistus, its notions of secret spiritual knowledge became popular, while religious notions rooted in magic and the occult became popular to the French intelligentsia. People like, Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), reinterpreted Christianity, and created completely new religions (*cf.*, Swedenborgianism). At the same time, other religions were created based upon the study of ancient Greco-Roman religions (Johnson, 2004). With the dawn of the Industrial Revolution came still more new

religions: Joseph Smith's, *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, Mary Baker Eddy's, *Christian Science*, and Madame Blavatsky's, *Theosophical Society*, to name just a few.

In the late 19th Century and beyond, paganism began to resurface. With “the repeal of the Witch Act in Britain in 1951, English witchcraft began to proliferate openly, and in the 1960's Sybil Leek and other articulate exponents rose into prominent view in the media, conducting a skilful public relations campaign to advance the image of Wicca, the ‘old knowledge,’ as they preferred to call their religion” (Lovelace, in Montgomery, 1976:80). Widespread popular interest in the supernatural, and things like demons, angels, spiritual healings and more, has grown exponentially; while the modernized, traditionalist churches remain locked in their naturalist mindset. “We have seen that virtually all forms of occult practice have been enjoying a renaissance since the late nineteenth century, at first in a relatively covert and quiet way, and then openly and dramatically within the last decade or so” (Lovelace, in Montgomery, 1976:84).

How may we explain these great changes? Missiologist David Bosch suggests that a “fundamental reason lies in the fact that the narrow Enlightenment perception of rationality has, at long last, been found to be an inadequate cornerstone one which to build one's life” (Bosch, 2000:352). Os Guinness and Francis Schaeffer suggested, “that the pervasive anti-rationalism in many sectors of the twentieth-century intellectual climate has helped breed this kind of movement” (Lovelace, in Montgomery, 1976:85). Philip Jenkins said the “search for alternative Christianities has been a perennial phenomenon within Western culture since the Enlightenment; it has never vanished entirely, though in different eras, it has attracted larger or smaller degrees of public attention” (Jenkins, 2001:15). He further argues that the current situation is largely the failure of God's people to be and do what God called them to do -- to be light and salt, not religion (Mat. 5:13).

Postmoderns now routinely blend traditional, home-grown, and more exotic religious beliefs. This is making for some extremely interesting new religious thinking -- though reflecting historically, none of these ‘new’ religious constructs is very much different from what mankind has concocted at some point previously. Most spiritual seekers in the

contemporary West look not to the churches, but to all manner of other options to feed their spiritual hunger.

Postmodern spirituality emerged in the 1960's, as both a rejection of traditional, institutional Christianity, and the full-blown pagan renaissance. There is also far less religio-cultural distance between the postmodern West and much of the rest of the world. Itioka, writing about mission trends in 1990, said, "What we are seeing is a reversal of worldviews. While the northern hemisphere is becoming more pagan, the southern hemisphere is being evangelized" (Itioka, 1990:10).

McCallum believes we "can characterize postmodern spirituality as a flight from the pursuit of historical and propositional truth to a preoccupation with mystical experience... To postmodern mystics, reason and evidence are deemed unnecessary, and even viewed with suspicion" (McCallum, 1996:211). Donald Nugent suggests that the occult revival that took place during the European Renaissance period, has many commonalities with the postmodern occult revival today, adding:

there is in both a degree of primitivism and psychic stavism, with an underlying substratum of despair. Both are eras where power is sought by the disenfranchised, especially women... in the Renaissance one finds only one warlock for every 10,000 witches -- and both have seen a growth of sexual license and pornographic literature. Each has been influenced by a new measure of contact with Eastern culture, and each has seen an increase in the use of psychedelic drugs (Lovelace, in Montgomery, 1976:85).

Proponents of contemporary postmodern religion suggest the reasons for the animistic resurgence is, "nostalgia for the natural and rural world, feminism, sexual liberation, dissatisfaction with established religious institutions and social norms, and a desire for greater individual self-expression and self-fulfilment" (Ankarloo, 1999:viii). All across the Western cultural landscape are the manifest signs of resurgent animism. 'Tats,' or tattoos are extremely common, as are all manner of body piercings. Toleration, eclecticism, relativism and pluralism abound in the postmodern spiritual renaissance.

A question that remains unanswered is, just how many Neo-Pagan adherents are there? Despite the attempts of several major research groups, and quite a few university researchers, no reliable figures are yet available, mostly it seems, because Neo-Pagans are not particularly willing to make their allegiance known. Not a few Christian alarmists and various proponents of conspiracy theories have claimed the rise in Neo-Paganism and various other non-Christian beliefs to be enormous, yet all their claims remain largely unsubstantiated. If book sales and Website popularity were the gauge, one might conclude the number of adherents to be vastly larger than official data. My own very unscientific survey of Amazon.com book sales, found that New Age, Wicca, Pagan, and other such book offerings, numbered into the tens of thousands. The popularized pseudo New Age, Harry Potter books, have sold nearly 100 million copies of late, and a host of other such books are nearly as popular.

Some adherents of New Age and Neo-Pagan spiritualities made their preferences known during the extensive 2001 *American Religious Identification Survey* study, showing the number of adherents has grown 240% since 1990 in the US, from 20,000 to around 96,000. Adherents of Eastern religions have also grown considerably, 401,000 in 1990, to about 1,527,019 in 2004, a 170% increase. Hinduism has grown to 1,081,051 adherents, an increase of 237%. Native American religionists have grown to 145,363 in 2004, an increase of 119%. Baha'i has increased 200%, to 118,549 adherents, and Sikhism 338% to about 81,000 adherents (Keysar, 2001). The data does not reveal how many of these adherents are immigrants, as opposed to converts. The data also does not tell us how many who publicly claim adherence to a major religion -- 75-80% in the US still claim to be Christian -- are also thoroughly interested in other religions, eclectically blending them as postmoderns are so apt to do? While some study may eventually reveal the answer to the first, I doubt the second can be answered, simply because (a) people do not want to make these personal preferences known, and (b), because so very many people are thoroughly confused about the whole matter of religion.

In Australia, the 1996 government census showed that adherence to Roman Catholicism remained about steady at 27% (or 4.8 million) of the population. Adherence to Anglicanism, by comparison, declined from 31% in 1971, to 21.8% in 1996. Christian

adherence overall declined from 86.2% in 1971 to 70.3% in 1996. The 2001 government census showed that those admitting to Neo-Pagan, or New Age adherence were still small, but growing: Druidism (697 members), nature religions (2,176 and 49 members), Paganism (10,632 members), pantheism (1,085 members), and Wicca (8,755 members), a total of 23,394. These numbers are double those given by self-identified pagans in the 1991 Australian government census (Bouma, 1999).

Prof. Ronald Hutton (University of Bristol), author of several books on the subject including, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (2001), have compared membership lists, attendance at major events, magazine subscriptions and the like, to gather better data about the true number of Neo-Pagan adherents. Yet, because of membership overlap, and inaccurate record-keeping, these studies are only of marginal value. Another group, the *Covenant of the Goddess* (www.cog.org), conducted a North American poll in 1999 that estimated the Neo-Pagan population at nearly 800,000. This figure may actually be more accurate than the data produced *via* traditional research. Again, what is nearly impossible to know, and what is arguably the major concern, is how many ‘dabble’ and ‘blend’ Neo-Pagan, Eastern and various other beliefs with traditional religions?

Leffel and McCallum wondered why some central features of Eastern mysticism and postmodernism were so strikingly similar (McCallum, 1996:205). They acknowledge that postmodernism is rooted in Nietzsche, Heidegger, Marx and others, but also note the seeming Eastern and tribal (or animistic) religious influence. The commonality, they believe, is the lack of respect that all give to rationality. This relativistic, irrational bent in postmodernism, has helped contribute to wider acceptance of Eastern thinking, which has also been a popular alternative religion and worldview since about the 1960’s, about the same time the deconstructive postmodern wave peaked, and the pagan renaissance gained wide popularity.

Because postmodern analysis is in harmony with Eastern religion, postmodernists also may have hijacked Western interest in mysticism as a vehicle for propagating their views. The cultures that spawned Eastern religions as well as animistic mysticisms are

also among the oppressed, non-European cultures championed by affirmative postmodernists (McCallum, 1996:206).

Many postmodern spiritual seekers now look to the mystical past for fulfilment. They easily blend whatever suits their pleasure, including ancient Gnostic writings, the Sufi Muslim and Kabalistic Jewish traditions, and all manner of Eastern religions, and Native American spiritualities. Even the Christian Charismatic-Pentecostal streams of the faith are popular among postmodern spiritual seekers, who are also glad to mix these and other Christian forms; with whatever other spirituality interests them. Francis Schaeffer warned decades ago, that this passion for mysticism was coming, that rationality would virtually be abandoned for subjective spirituality, making each individual the captain of his or her own religious path.

It is no secret that in our day (c.2007), a substantial portion of modernized Western Christianity no longer believes in traditional Christian doctrines, like the virgin birth of Christ, his ascension to heaven, or his eventual return. These modernist, and naturalist, Western churches are ill-equipped, for the most part, to deal with the Pagan renaissance, the growing Western preoccupation with the demonic, and the powers of darkness. There is little question that many of the Western churches need to learn again, what it means to do warfare in the heavenlies (*cf.*, 2Co. 10:4). “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).

The simple lesson for us is this: all over the world Christians are meeting followers of New religions and world religions at a time when new technologies and social changes abound. Once Western Christian missionaries met these faiths only in Asia and Africa. Now Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic believers meet us in all Western countries. As evangelical scholars like Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe have indicated, the new religions form global sub-cultures of unreached people groups. The broad brushstrokes of modern history suggest to us that here we have a fresh missional challenge that cannot be avoided. This is a new frontier for missions

(Johnson, 2004).

Contemporary new realities for the church are several. First, the initiative in global evangelisation is passing to the churches in the developing world. Secondly, interest in Eastern religions and Neo-Paganism has exploded in Western nations in recent years. Lastly, the influx of many immigrants from the developing world into Western nations is having an impact.

Postmodern Spiritual Hunger

Roland Benedikter is a member of the *Institute for the History of Ideas and Research on Democracy*, Innsbruck, Austria. He did an extensive interview with Elizabeth Debold of *What Is Enlightenment Magazine*, in June 2005. The result was one of the most insightful discussions about postmodern spirituality to date. Benedikter believes the postmodern cultural wave hit full stride around 1970. Postmodernists Lyotard, Derrida, Deleuze, Lacan and others headed this rebellion against what they perceived to be the wrong ideologies and fixed systems that drove Western societies, and were suffocating social life.

Benedikter suggests the postmoderns intended two cultural waves. The first, and to date best known, was the deconstructionist phase. The second, and yet to develop in any substantive form, was always intended to be the reconstructionist phase, in which the postmoderns would build from the deconstructed ruins of modernity, a better Western world. Benedikter also believes two additional cultural dynamics have been at work during the same period. The first is the global renaissance of religion, especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union; and the other is the development of postmodern 'proto-spirituality,' especially during late postmodernism, which he identifies as the period c.1979-2001.

Benedikter believes the postmoderns -- Jacques Derrida, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Helene Cixous, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *etc.* -- were products of the European revolutionary impulse, quintessentially begun with the French Revolution (c.1789). He believes this spirit remains alive today, especially among the French, who still deeply embrace the notions of freedom and brotherhood, but even more, the notion of 'equality.' Benedikter believes postmoderns are a rekindling of the French Revolutionary spirit. Both groups call into question social inequalities and injustices, and change where possible. Benedikter believes the postmoderns see themselves in this role, toppling strong, unjust hierarchies.

The postmodernist effort to topple unjust governments and institutions, like institutional Christianity, began in earnest at Berkley and San Francisco in the 1960's. The immediate question for them at the time, was how do mere students topple powerful governments and institutions, and change society? The postmoderns believed their goals could be accomplished through socially deconstructing "the pillars of hierarchical organisational patterns in the European-Western societies" (Benedikter, 2005). Because the students were largely unable to produce change through violent means -- the way the peasants toppled the French government -- these new [postmodern] revolutionaries infused the notion of self-deconstruction into philosophical discourse, especially among the academics, which are still the largest progenitors of social disestablishment in the West today. Benedikter further notes that Europeans, in particular, are wary that postmodern individuality may turn into something collective, even when driven by high goals. He believes Europeans are especially sceptical about such groups gaining collective consciousness, because of Europe's history with groups like the Nazi's.

The first postmodern wave was rooted in deconstruction, or what some called, social 're-fragmentation.' Thus, the first generation of true postmoderns was the 'wrecking crew,' the destroyers, or the disestablishmentarians. They were certainly not builders of something new and better. According to Benedikter, the postmodernists thought: "Maybe the next generation will build something new, or maybe not; but we, in any case, have to deconstruct the wrong concepts and open up the field radically, by going to destroy, disseminate and pluralize the roots... That is the necessary first step" (Benedikter, 2005).

The postmodernists undertook this course of action mainly from 1979 until 2001. Benedikter said the second generation of postmoderns is now left to carry on where the first generation left off, charged with building a new system from the wreckage of the [deconstructed] old. While there are those who now recognize the need to go beyond first-generation postmodernity and deconstruction, efforts to ‘re-create’ according to the postmodern ideology are still extremely disjointed, as youth explore their world, and consider how to shape the future.

Within the broader notion of deconstruction, was the implication that institutional religion -- considered dogmatic and intolerant by the postmoderns -- should also be deconstructed, especially in favour of a more tolerant, pluralist spirituality: precisely what has happened. Further, in the West we now see essentially two Christianities. The first are the traditional forms, still thoroughly entrenched in modernity, and so much like ‘old lights’ of the past, mostly unwilling to change to meet current challenges. The second are the postmodern forms which are presently shaping a culturally contextualised Christianity (*e.g.*, Emerging Church), often retaining the best of historic Christianity, while responding contextually to present cultural changes and challenges.

Benedikter said the late writings of the postmoderns, which are far less studied than their earlier works, show a decided “ethical and theological turn” (*ibid.*). Derrida, in particular, made this turn to the ethical and theological, though certainly not in the conventional-traditional sense. Through his struggles he developed, what Benedikter calls, a proto-spirituality, motivated by his war with himself (*Cf.* Jacques Derrida: *Like the Sound of the Sea Deep Within a Shell*; Paul de Man’s: *War*. University of Chicago Press 1988; *cf.* Jacques Derrida, *Je Suis En Guerre Contre Moi Meme*, in: *Le Monde*, Mardi, 12 October 2004, pgs. VI-VII). Benedikter believes here is the point at which the postmoderns turn to embrace their innate human need for spirituality, though hardly according to convention. This is what Benedikter considers true postmodern spirituality, or ‘proto-spirituality,’ taken from the written thoughts of Derrida, Lyotard and Foucault, who used terms like, ‘re-spiritualize,’ to describe their thinking about spirituality.

Benedikter said there seems to be a search today for a new ‘essentialism’ -- a spirituality for today’s needs, a self-critical spirituality for the [postmodern] global civil

society. He believes postmoderns are hungry for spiritual alternatives to traditional religious forms, and want with it a philosophical realism. To his mind, postmoderns seek the spiritual, but not the religious. They have a desire for the transcendental, the personal enlightened consciousness, but without all the dogmas and restrictions that come with traditional religions. He does not believe a renaissance of traditional religious forms can meet the deep spiritual hunger of the postmoderns, though some postmoderns are returning to traditional religions as part of the ‘retro’ aspect of postmodernity.

Benedikter agrees with others, that one of the essential goals of the postmodern revolution was to make people more aware of inequalities, personally and corporately, of ‘hidden hierarchies’ that control their lives and social surroundings. The unspoken hope among the postmodernists, was that beyond the deconstructive period would arise a new generation who would re-construct society into something more equitable for all. Thus, ‘tolerance’ and ‘plurality’ remain something of a mantra for the entire movement. Benedikter suggests that the essence of all that Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard and the others strived for was this:

Deconstruct yourself: See what you are not. You have to destroy your illusions. To reach progress in society, we have to forget about all essentials, and to see: Everything, including your self, is just a construct by socio-economic and cultural processes. Then we all will live better, and that means: more self-conscious and, eventually, more equal. Even if we will have to pay the price of having nothing ‘objective’ left on which we could build enduring truths and values, and even if man himself, following this path, must lose his ‘essence’ than (Benedikter, 2005).

Benedikter believes the falsity and futility of the postmodernity was made intensely obvious after 9-11 [World Trade Center, NY], when so many who had, to varying degrees, embraced the postmodern notion, realised how empty it was, and began returning to more conventional and traditional forms of life and spirituality. The ‘nothingness’ produced by postmodernity has produced a recoil of desire for a “return of the objective,” or the “return to essence” (*ibid.*). Benedikter fully realises that

deconstruction leads to a foundationless existence, and notes how the postmoderns:

..tried to destroy all illusions by transforming everything into a construct -- with the goal to realize fully the principle of equality as the guiding principle of a more open, pluralistic and progressive society. But they did not build anything positive as alternative to the illusions. They did not create a theory, an observation that could explain what your real I or your spirit is. They just tried to destroy your false I. And nothing more. Leaving nothing behind. Nothing in the strict sense of the word (*ibid.*).

Benedikter also believes there is an important difference between Western postmodern ‘nothingness,’ and Eastern philosophical and religious ‘nothingness.’ Postmodern ‘nothingness’ is the hoped for product of deconstruction, where the facades and illusions of social hierarchies are removed, and laid bare. Hindu thinkers, for example, might say: What this postmodern culture tries unconsciously to realize with deconstruction is to break through the veil of the Maya. It tries to destroy the illusion of the world and of the normal I. That is the *avant-garde* of this culture -- but this *avant-garde* is deeply ambivalent. It tries to destroy all illusions; but it does so unconsciously. It does not know what it does. Therefore it knows not how to proceed after coming near the breakthrough. The postmodern spiritualist works to break through the “veil of Maya,” but does so unintentionally, where the Eastern religionist does so intentionally (Benedikter, 2005). Despite differences, postmodernity and Eastern thought are easily conjoined. Benedikter also sees postmoderns working toward a spirituality that merges Platonism and Aristotelism, a necessary component of the continuation of the Globalisation process, bringing West and East closer, in the epoch of transhumanism, and of the “re-invention of the men by the men” (Peter Sloterdijk, in Benedikter, 2005).

It is most interesting that postmoderns, like many scientists, have come to the point at which they recognize, *via* causality, the need, or requirement for a ‘prime mover’ (*cf.*, Ayn Rand; Aristotle), or source, or point of origin for all that exists. Postmodern deconstructionists reach this point, because they eventually come to realise that all things, both material and spiritual, had to originate somewhere. Like so many before them, the

postmoderns are not quick to embrace the God of the Bible, but they do recognize the need for a ‘something-ness’ that exists beyond one’s “normal ego-consciousness” (Benedikter, 2005). The thirty plus years of deconstruction has given rise to recognition of the “primordial basis,” or in Ayn Rand’s words, “the fountainhead” (*ibid.*). The “continuous presence of an origin out of itself” (Jean Gebser, in Benedikter, 2005), is something rational and logically operational. Deconstruction thus led the postmoderns to the “productive void,” where thought and substance could not be deconstructed, or reduced further (*ibid.*), so they as so many others throughout history, have come to the end of themselves, and are left wondering, is there nothing more?

Neo-Paganism

Over the centuries, the church and the secular humanists failed to fully remove animistic, superstitious, mythical tendencies and spiritual hunger in people. More often, these drives and desires were suppressed, not removed, and movements like Paganism simply went underground. In addition, the Church embraced the naturalist agenda of the humanists. A spiritual vacuum still needed to be filled, and Paganism began to resurface.

Skepticism based on the assumed infallibility and universal sovereignty of reason was the constitutive character of modernity. It was designed to eliminate faith and re-channel man’s inherent compulsion to submit and worship. New Gods and new traditions were invented, new prophets were proclaimed and new heavens were imagined. But religion has not only survived the five hundred year assault on God and his messages, but has returned with an increased fervor that baffles the postmodern being (Khan, 2000).

While postmodernity never really promotes a return to animistic tendencies, and/or beliefs in the supernatural, it does little, or nothing to discourage it. In the process,

postmodernity has opened the door for all manner of religio-spiritual expressions, many of which re-ignite mankind's animistic hunger. One of the most noticeable of these is the renaissance of Paganism, or Neo-Paganism, as practitioners usually prefer to call themselves.

D.D. Carpenter, an adherent of Paganism, believes Griffin (1988, 1990) identifies a number of themes that characterize postmodern spirituality, nearly all of which accord fully with the resurgent Neo-Pagan beliefs. Griffin identifies traits such as: (1) the reality of internal relations or interconnection; (2) a non-dualistic relation of humans to Nature; (3) the immanence of both the past and the future in the present; (4) the universality and centrality of creativity; (5) post-patriarchy; (6) communitarianism (versus individualism and nationalism); (7) the 'de-privatization' of religion, meaning the rejection of the autonomy of morality, politics, and economics from religious values; and (8) the rejection of materialism, in the sense of economism, meaning the subordination of social, religious, moral, aesthetic, and ecological interests to short-term economic interests (Carpenter, 1992). Carpenter believes with others, that there is a relationship between postmodernity and Paganism, "because Paganism represents an attempt to synthesize premodern notions of divine reality, cosmic meaning and an enchanted nature with present day life. In addition, certain of the themes identified by Griffin (1988a, 1990) as characteristic of postmodern spirituality will be shown to be descriptive of contemporary Paganism" (Carpenter, 1992).

Defining Neo-Paganism, and other new spiritualities in the contemporary West, is much like attempting to define Christianity in contemporary Africa: a very difficult to do. Neo-Pagan beliefs are, among other things, non-Jewish, non-Christian and non-Islamic. To the major religions, Pagans are often considered 'heathens,' or those with a lack of religion, which is a misnomer. Pagan religions are not well ordered, nor do they subscribe to a well-ordered set of doctrines. Witchcraft, the occult, alchemy and other sub-disciplines are usually considered within Neo-Pagan family, but Satanism is usually thought too extreme. It is fascinating how many ancient Pagan practices were long ago incorporated, or 'redeemed,' into Western culture and Christian practice, and remains accepted practices today.

Contemporary Pagans are represented by an enormous diversity of groups, linked by common traditions, which include the ‘old nature’ and fertility cults of the Celts and Norsemen, magical and alchemical traditions, the mystery traditions and others, as well as the more recent Wicca. These beliefs and practices have been reconstructed from the ‘old,’ or ‘ancient’ ways. Druidic practices, for example, are based on the practices of the ancient Celtic professional class, the followers of Asatru practice are taken from pre-Christian Norse religion, and Wicca, a more recent religious construct, traces its roots to pre-Celtic Europe. Still other groups follow Roman, Greek, Egyptian, Babylonian and various other ancient religio-spiritual practices.

Neo-Paganism fills a longing to connect with God in the natural world. Neo-Pagans look to ancient religions that were nature-based as a source of inspiration. Some are inspired by the ancient Norse traditions, while others look to ancient Celtic religions. There are those who feel inspired by the shamanic traditions of the North American Indians and Australian Aborigines. Some belong to Druidic groups whose historical links go back to the eighteenth century, but devotees romantically imagine they are linked to ancient Celtic priests. Other seekers, called techno-shamans, can be found participating in the worldwide youth dance cultures. These spiritualities use rituals and liturgies that find the divine spirit in the natural world. Often their ethics involve them in anti-globalisation protests and ecological activism (Johnson, 2004).

Animism is an important pillar of the Neo-Pagan Witches’ world. Many Neo-Pagans believe that both animate and inanimate objects are links in the chain of life, all of which is fluid, or dynamic, and part of the ‘life force’ of the earth. Neo-Pagans seek to live in harmony, and be physically ‘in tune’ with nature. To Neo-pagan’s the ‘life force’ is immanent within all creation: rocks, trees, deserts, streams, mountains, valleys, ponds, oceans, gardens, forest, fish and fowl -- from the amoeba to humans and all in-between. All these are infused with this ‘life force,’ or energy. For them, the earth is a living, breathing organism, where all is sacred, and all is to be cared for and revered. Neo-

Pagans are usually worshippers of the Mother Goddess, who with ‘god,’ created the earth.

Some pagan groups focus on particular cultural religious traditions, such as Celtic, Druidic, Egyptian, or Norse rituals and practices... Through the use of magic neo-pagans seek to draw on the cosmic powers that underlie the universe in their Own personal quest for blessing, success, fertility, and harmony. Worshippers are generally organized into small autonomous groups, often called ‘covens’ (D.J. Hayward, in Moreau, 2000:674).

By many definitions, animism is the basic belief in spiritual beings, and is the most rudimentary definition of a religion. Thus, Neo-Paganistic beliefs are animistic, but also more. While Paganism is not as well defined as the so-called higher religions (*e.g.*, Christianity), it has more structure than tribal animists, for example. Animistic practices and beliefs are found in many religious expressions, but not all religions are animistic. In addition, some Pagans consider themselves pantheists, but not all. Some Neo-pagans practice Wicca, but not all.

Animists, along with many Pagans, believe, “that personal spiritual beings and impersonal spiritual forces have power over human affairs and, consequently, that human beings must discover what beings and forces are influencing them in order to determine future action and, frequently, to manipulate their power” (Van Rheenen 1996a, 19-20). Animism is one of the oldest forms of Pagan religion, common to pre-literate, nomadic and hunting peoples, and is an important pillar of the Neo-Pagan Witches’ world. “The animist sees himself as being surrounded by spirit beings at every moment of his existence. His relationship to these spirit beings governs his conduct in life” (Nicholls, 1994:57).

Attempting to define and distinguish one group from the other is nearly impossible, which is why the terms Pagan and animist are used inter-changeably. Important to our discussion, many contemporary Pagans are known as “eclectic practitioners,” because they draw from various sources for their beliefs, which fits well with the overall postmodern penchant for eclecticism. Because postmoderns are anti-foundationalists, and are opposed to metanarratives like the Bible, the manner in which Pagans and

postmoderns is quite similar, and thus easily united.

There are many neo-pagans who are monotheists, polytheists or duo theists. Many regard the gods as real, not simply as aspects of a male or female deity. Hence, the gods are worshipped as themselves. Some groups, such as the *Church of All Worlds*, acknowledge one another as manifestations of deity, addressing each other in ritual as “Thou art God, Thou art Goddess.” Not all groups worship all gods. Some may only worship the Norse pantheon or the Greek. Others may only worship specific gods, alone or in combination with gods from the same or different pantheons. In some groups each person has their own deities, while the group may have tutelary deities (Hadden).

For some Neo-Pagans, and most animists, there is a relationship between the divine and human, the sacred and profane, the holy and secular. People believe spirits influence what happens in the seen world, and people consequently live in constant fear of these spirits. There is also a belief that animals, plants, mountains and other inanimate things have spirits. “Animists impute human attributes to the world...” (R.J. Priest, in Moreau, 2000:63). Missiologist Gailyn Van Rheen believes Neo-Pagans are closer to other animists than many Neo-pagans like to admit, and adds:

Animism... is not merely the religion of tribal societies. Animism is prevalent in every continent and is part of every culture, although it is more formative in some than others. In Western contexts animistic customs include channelling and magical use of crystals in the New Age movement, ritual practices of the occult, and the readings of the horoscopes to perceive how the alignment of heavenly bodies affect the living. Spiritism in Brazil, Santeria in Cuba, voodoo in Haiti, ancestral veneration among the Chinese, Shintoism in Japan, and cargo cult in Melanesia are all types of animistic systems... There are also animistic undercurrents to all major religions as they are practiced around the world. For example, spiritism is an ideology followed by

most Catholics in Brazil. Many Muslims not only worship God at the mosque on Friday but also venerate holy men at their tombs. Hindus not only believe in karma, reincarnation, and samsara, but they also presume that rakasas (evil spirits) and ancestors influence life and, therefore, must be manipulated and controlled. Paradoxically most of the people coming to Christ in the world are of an animistic tradition, while the missionaries initiating movements and evangelizing in those contexts are of a secular heritage (Van Rheen, 1991).

In most regions of the world, animism blends with other religions, including Christianity. Within all the major religious blocs are many who syncretistically mix animistic beliefs with the tenets of these other faith constructs. In fact, animistic beliefs actually dominate the world. For example, most Taiwanese believe in the Chinese folk religions, yet many are Christian. Most Hindus and Muslims in Central and Southeast Asia, along with most Buddhists in China and Japan blend their religion with a variety of folk (animistic) beliefs and practices. It is also very true that in many parts of the world, Christianity has not displaced the local folk religion, but rather coexists with it (*e.g.*, Mexico, Central Africa, Brazil).

Missiologist Phil Parshall also believes animism is far more prevalent around the world than is generally acknowledged. An expert on Islam, Parshall says 70 percent of all Islamic people are Folk Muslims and only 30 percent orthodox (Parshall, 1983:16). Hoornaert writes that in Brazil, for example, Spiritism is “the expression of the religion lived by the majority of Brazilians” (Hoornaert, 1982:72). Roughly, one-quarter of the Brazilian people are overt spiritists and numerous Catholics are active spiritists as well, especially when confronted by extreme illness, catastrophe, or interpersonal problems. Nielson estimates that more Brazilians regularly engage in spiritist rituals than go to Catholic mass (Nielson, 1988:94). Concerning Africa, theologian Bolaji Idowu writes, “It is well known that in strictly personal matters relating to the passages of life and the crises of life, African Traditional Religion is regarded as the final succour by most Africans... In matters concerning providence, healing, and general well-being, therefore, most Africans still look to ‘their own religion’ as ‘the way’” (1973, 206).

Animistic beliefs are also far more prevalent in the ‘secular’ West than commonly believed. Throughout the United States, for example, many people are ‘superstitious.’ They do not step on lines; they wear their lucky hat, carry a rabbit’s foot, or hang a Native American ‘dream catcher’ from the rear view mirror in their automobile. In this traditionally Christian and secular culture, such practices are not publicly endorsed, but such beliefs and practices are widespread. David Hesselgrave said: “Cults and the occult, Satanism and witchcraft, are not only surviving on the mission fields of the world, they are also thriving there and simultaneously invading the Western world” (Hesselgrave, 1988:205). In 1986, Lesslie Newbigin plainly identified Western culture as Pagan. This culture, “born out of the rejection of Christianity is far more resistant to the Gospel than the pre-Christian Paganism with which cross-cultural missions have been familiar” (Newbigin, 1986:20).

The new attitude toward religion and the proliferation of religious practices has to be understood as part of the revolt against modernity. The modern ideologies of indefinite progress and social utopia were actually myths that attracted and mobilized the masses for action. Their collapse has brought awareness of a vacuum and disillusionment about the reality of human reason to give meaning to life and provide answers for deep existential questions. This is at the root of the search for alternatives, for an ability to handle mystery, for contact with the occult, for a connection with extra-rational forces that may influence the course of events in individual lives as well as in communities and nations (Escobar, 2003).

People innately seem to need ‘certainty’ in life -- but there is simply none to be had. If it is not tsunami’s, hurricane’s, pestilence, famine, or earthquake’s, it is man’s incessant quarrelling with one another (*cf.*, Jam. 4:1f) that keeps even the most wealthy and seemingly secure among us from realizing true ‘certainty’ about much of anything. People quite naturally seek ‘control,’ or ‘power’ over these uncertainties in life. Some turn to the God of Christianity, surrendering their will to His. Most other religionists, in various ways, attempt to retain personal control over the deity and the unseen world,

which is one of the key factors that set Christianity apart from all other religions and belief systems. Lesslie Newbigin adds:

We seek a security for ourselves that we were not meant to have, because the only security for which we were made is security in God, security in God's free grace. The search for certainty apart from grace has led... to a profound loss of nerve, a deep scepticism about the possibility of knowing the truth. We are shut up in ourselves (Newbigin, 1996:16).

People fear what they do not understand, or cannot control, so they attempt to understand, to have power over whatever it is that affects their security and happiness. However they are understood, this is precisely why spiritists seek to manipulate these unseen powers. The person seeks to manipulate and control spiritual beings, ancestors, and forces of nature, to do his will. Many around the globe believe the unseen or spiritual realm can be manipulated, or controlled. Such beliefs are common to animist, Wiccan and various other beliefs. Having power in, and/or control over this realm has been the desire of humans throughout the ages.

The God of the Bible forbids such things, and those who seek to control their world *via* such means are therefore disobedient to *Yahweh*, and in rebellion against Him. "For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry" (1Sa. 15:23a; *cf.*, Deu. 18:9-14; 2Ch. 33:1f). The children of Israel were forbidden to practice magic, divination and witchcraft, practices borrowed from the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and various others. Such practices encouraged doubt about *Yahweh*, and dependence upon demons (*cf.*, 1Co. 10:14-22; 1Ti. 4:1; Rev. 9:20). "Superstition not infrequently goes hand in hand with scepticism" (Smith, 1997). In contrast, the naturalists, those of the Enlightenment, or modernity, seek to control their world through natural, not *via* the supernatural, or spiritual means, but as mentioned, the postmodern cultural wave is changing these long accepted notions. Samuel Escobar adds:

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indefinite progress and social utopia were actually myths that attracted and mobilized the masses for action. Their collapse has brought awareness of a vacuum and disillusionment about the ability of human reason to give meaning to life and provide answers for deep Existential questions. This is at the root of the search for alternatives, for an ability to handle mystery, for contact with the occult, for a connection with extra-rational forces that may influence the course of events in individual lives as well as in communities and nations (Escobar, 2003:78).

Where modernity tried to make man ‘god’ over the natural realm in a closed universe, postmodernity makes man master over any realm that might exist, for postmodernity is not quite certain of anything, except that it doubts the ultimate truths others have foisted upon them, but does believe there are horizons of human endeavour yet unrealized. All humans want to have ‘power’ over their lives and their environment. Modernity through scientific developments, has given humanity a measure of control, or power, over the environment. New Age or Neo-Paganistic beliefs give humans a sense of control, or power, over the unseen world that people seem to innately know exists.

Further, Western Christianity -- so deeply accommodated to modernism -- is largely unable to respond to the animist renaissance in the West, even as modernist Western missionaries are so-often ill equipped to handle animistic beliefs and practices outside the West. David Hesselgrave insightfully noted: “It may seem incongruous to the missionary heading for Sao Paulo or Santiago to study tribal religion, but it is doubtful that he will ever really understand Catholicism as it is actually practiced by Brazilians and Chileans -- to say nothing of widespread spiritism -- until he does. And understanding must precede effective communication” (Hesselgrave, 1978, 193).

Actually, this is good news for evangelistic-minded Christians, because animists are historically more receptive to Christianity. John Stott noted that the great mass movements into Christianity have often involved people from broadly ‘animistic’ backgrounds. By comparison, conversions to Christianity from the major ‘culture-religions’ -- Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Moslems and Marxists -- are less frequent (Coote,

1980:viii). For example, when the great missionary Adoniram Judson died after 37 years of labour in Burma, he left only 100 converts from Buddhism, but 7,000 converts from the animistic Karens (Coote, 1980:viii).

In part, the Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal movement, born in the early 20th Century, seems something of a divine response to the accommodation of the Western churches to the Enlightenment and its lower-only world. “At the dawn of the twentieth century a novel and virile version of Christianity, the Pentecostal movement, made its appearance and has since grown to become the largest single category in Protestantism, outstripping the Lutheran, Reformed, and Anglican communions” (Bosch, 2000:352). Pentecostalism is now extremely popular in the developing world, especially among the illiterate and poor. David Barrett reports that 71% of all Pentecostals are non-white; 66% live in the Two-Thirds World; 87% live in poverty; and the majority are urban dwellers. The modernist churches still (sometimes) vehemently criticize Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals for their fresh embrace of supernatural Christianity. While their criticisms help to counter the inevitable extremes of mysticism in the faith, their penchant for ‘natural’ Christianity is ill-equipped to meet the challenges of the Neo-Pagan renaissance that postmodernity has helped produce, and in so many ways encourages. In many ways, Pentecostalism has been God’s answer to the syncretism of Christianity with modernity, as most Pentecostal groups are also extremely ‘fundamental,’ or orthodox in their views toward Scripture, countering the widespread disrespect the modernist churches have. It seems no coincidence that Pentecostalism, in its various expressions, has done much to fill the spiritual vacuum in the West, as these streams of the faith are uniquely able to respond to the deep spiritual hunger and searching’s to many postmoderns have. Pentecostalism is also uniquely able to respond to the new challenges presented by the Neo-Pagans.

New Age

Also very popular among postmoderns is New Age spirituality, both similar and different from Neo-Paganism. “New Age” became popular terminology in the 1980’s. The term describes a quasi-religious set of beliefs, encompassing a wide array of beliefs. These practices are largely confined to the industrialised West. They can be also be traced to the socio-political unrest of the 1960’s, and the height of postmodern deconstructionism. “The 21st Century has opened with a widespread resurgence of interest in spirituality” (Clifford, 2003:2). This resurgence is primarily due to two factors: (1) the long period of spiritual repression by modernity; and (2) the dawn of the postmodern cultural wave.

In the Western world there is a growing sense of need to have some spiritual orientation in life. However, those who pursue this quest for spirituality are uncomfortable with institutionalised religion. They are also disturbed by explanations of life that are based on scientific reductionism, as well as the consumerist tenets of society. As a result many Westerners have adopted practices and worldviews from other religious and spiritual traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism as well as from the Pagan past of Europe and from various shamanic traditions (Johnson, 2004).

Many postmodern spiritual seekers are looking to the past for present fulfilment, often turning to pre-modern religions and spiritualities. “Seekers do not wish to revert to pre-modernity, but rather to blend the best elements of modernity with carefully selected morsels of pre-modern spiritual practice. So, New Age spirituality attempts to re-sacralize a world that has been de-supernaturalized by modernity” (Clifford, 2003:11). Terms like Aquarian Age, New Consciousness, New Edge, New Spirituality, Next Age, Next Stage, and Postmodern Spirituality, have now mostly replaced the once popular term, “New Age.” Where these new religious expressions were long considered fringe and ‘off-beat,’ they have now become mainstream and normative, almost as much so as

the higher religions.

The plethora of New Age beliefs run the gamut from pre-Christian, Pagan beliefs to the embrace of Eastern philosophies. Animistic religions and worldviews have become wildly popular. Native American religion has become very popular in North America. Many seem them as a cultural representation of the first Americans, but others embrace the spiritual connotations attached to them. The notion of tribalism, closely associated with many animistic cultures, has become widely popular as well. New Age religions are rooted in the relativistic Eastern philosophies and religions, again, according well with the postmodern penchant for anti-rationalism. “New Agers generally follow postmodern assumptions, and should therefore be viewed as within the postmodern fold” (McCallum, 1996:208).

Because all is one -- the pantheistic view -- all are gods. Thus, postmodern spirituality and New Age thinking are “explicitly concerned with the journey toward realizing our essential divinity” (*ibid.*). Like the religious pluralists, all paths lead to God. The true path becomes self-enlightenment and self-empowerment, as well as self-love. People do not have to look outside themselves for spiritual fulfilment; they have only to look to the inner self. For this reason, postmodern spirituality welcomes Eastern practices of meditation, hypnosis, creative visualization, and centering. These are practices common to many pantheistic and animistic beliefs and are as old as mankind.

Esoterism or esoteric religion is again very popular. Adherents of esoteric religions hunger for hidden, or privileged spiritual insights and knowledge (*cf.*, Gnosticism). Symbols and powers from ‘god,’ or other dimensions are now very popular. This is hardly surprising in a culture driven by the modernist penchant for progress, power and control. Theosophy, promotes “perennial wisdom,” and truth available beyond what the organised religions offer. Claims abound that the so-called, ascended masters have made these great, additional truths available to mankind. With this have again come historically unsubstantiated stories concerning the biblically un-mentioned years of Jesus' life, some suggesting he travelled to Tibet and India to gain enlightenment from other spiritual masters.

One way this manifests in postmodern culture is the fresh embrace of Hinduistic reincarnation beliefs, a way to appease the conscience, without actually having to deal with sin in any immediate sense. Westerners also routinely go to Eastern countries (*e.g.*, Katmandu, Nepal) looking for answers in their personal, spiritual quest. The reality they sometimes discover is that pantheistic cultures are often quite corrupt. People raised in Western cultures seldom realise how profoundly their worldview has been impacted by the Judeo-Christian sense of morality -- all rooted in biblical imperatives. This construct provides the individual the potential for one or many more chances to be and do good, earning one's way to Nirvana.

The postmodern approach accords well with postmoderns on their quest for 'self-actualisation.' We "shouldn't be surprised by the growth of pantheistic spirituality today. It fits in with the aspirations of the postmodern soul. People want something spiritual to answer the heart-cry that secular humanism could not meet. Pantheism provides an answer without violating the quest for a life without submission to objective realities like a supreme God, a strict moral code, and an infallible Bible" (Ajith Fernando, in Carson, 2000:135). Pantheistic cultures do not bow the knee to any supreme 'god.' This accords perfectly with the postmodern penchant for anti-foundationalism. Fernando identifies a key reality about Eastern religions and philosophies, that there is no true holy god, only 'gods' who are holy in much the same way the early Greek gods were 'above' humanity, but hardly holy like the God of the Bible.

The gods of Hinduism were morally neutral, and they are often seen to be doing things that we consider quite unholy. The emphasis in Those spiritualities is not so much on holiness in the sense of moral purity as on holiness in the sense of spiritual power -- of power over the mind, over the body, over anxiety and circumstances. We have seen that even in Christian circles when there is an emphasis on spiritual power, sometimes there is a tendency to neglect teaching on moral issues (Ajith Fernando, in Carson, 2000:134).

Fernando adds that with such religions the focus is "self; evil is reinterpreted and thus emasculated; and any notion of judgment imposed by a personal / transcendent God

whose wrath has been and will be displayed, is utterly repugnant” (Carson, 1996:41).

The mystery religions, then and now, promised “cleansing to deal with guilt, security to face fear of evil, power over fate, union with gods through orgiastic ecstasy, and immortality” (Escobar, 2003:78).

Many of the new religions in the West are either directly, or indirectly, products of the early Theosophist movement. By their own definition, Theosophy is a worldview that gives meaning and purpose to life. Theosophy claims to provide “ancient wisdom,” and supposedly has been around since time immemorial. It is a path, or way of life that further claims to lead to peace and selfless service. Theosophy emphasises unity and inter-connectedness of all life, the basic oneness of all species on earth and of all peoples. Adherents say it should be philosophically understood, not blindly accepted. Adherents also claim it is not a religion, and that its concepts and ideas are found in all major world religions in various ways.

Theosophy, which literally means ‘divine wisdom,’ forms probably the most influential source for today’s New Age spirituality. It combined elements of the Western esoteric traditions with Buddhist and Hindu concepts, creating new spiritual myths about a brotherhood of ascended masters, the lost years of Jesus, and offering the universal wisdom of the world’s faiths (Clifford, 2003:8).

The movement really gained momentum following the publication of *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) by Helena P. Blavatsky (1831-1891), a Russian-born, psychic and medium, and one of the co-founders of the Theosophical Society. In the book she quotes from Plato, Confucius, Guatama Buddha, Jesus and others, weaving a tapestry of some cosmological spiritual intelligence, claiming a vast potential still to be revealed through future cycles of evolution. According to the Theosophical Society of Australia, the universe is progressively unfolding latent spiritual powers, satisfying our need to belong to something greater than ourselves. Life’s inequalities are consequences of karma, the law of balance and harmony, which helps us understand life and why things work as they do. Through the process, they claim, we gain perspective about the continuum of many

lifetimes through which we grow towards spiritual maturity (*The Theosophical Society in Australia*).

Because traditional religious forms do not spiritually satisfy postmoderns, many are embracing New Age spiritualities. These do not provide a unified ideology or worldview. New Age is many groupings, therapies, methods, spiritualities, teachers, and networks. Yet, New Age spiritualities have some common goals, because it arises out of “the cultic milieu”, which understands its practices, ideas and experiences as alternatives to dominant religious and cultural trends.

Postmodern, New Age religious forms commonly promote yoga, meditation and chanting, for example; though their particular beliefs vary greatly. The fact that some quote Jesus or some other passage of the Bible, does not imply devotion to Christianity, but is just another expression of postmodern, eclectic religiosity. Counterfeit forms of Christianity, and all manner of wild, unfounded teachings about Jesus, and other traditional Christian history and doctrine are very common. Just as postmoderns deconstruct what they consider to be a mono-cultural West, so also does postmodernity work diligently to deconstruct the mono-cultural, Judeo-Christian West, working to replace it, or at very least diversify it, according to anti-foundationalist notions.

Traditional forms of Christianity no longer broadly appeal to people in the West, even in the US. This is definitely a contributing factor to the decline of the mainline denominations, which have been so quick to compromise doctrinally, but continues to resist contextualising to meet the changing culture. New Age spiritualities are what post-secular, postmodern, are most inclined to. These spiritual and religious forms allow great freedom in beliefs, etc. “Since the 1990s scholars have noticed that do-it-yourself spiritualities are more extensive than New Age. So the current umbrella term is New Spiritualities or Alternative Spiritualities” (Johnson, 2004).

The eclectic, mix and match, religiosity now so popular in the West, often gives greater weight to historically unsubstantiated religious claims. Conspiracy theories (*e.g.*, *The Da Vinci Code*) are wildly popular, even though usually based on admitted fictions. *Feng Shui*, fiction, myths, and gothic tales about the ‘undead’ are extremely popular. Such tales, mixed with the latest computer technologies, bring these fanciful tales to life

in the movies, further fulfilling the spiritual hunger so many postmoderns have. Some call this the re-enchantment of the West -- essentially a return to our animistic roots, albeit in new forms.

With few exceptions, modern scholars show little awareness of the very active debate about alternative Christianities which flourished in bygone decades, so that we have a misleading impression that all the worthwhile scholarship has been produced within the last thirty years or so. To the contrary, much of the evidence needed to construct a radical revision of Christian origins had been available for many years prior to the 1970's, if not the 1870's (Jenkins, 2001:13).

It is again relevant and necessary for Western Christians to appreciate the natural-supernatural duality as Jesus did. He treated Satan and demonic forces as real foes, frequently casting out demons and set free people he called 'captives' and 'oppressed' (Luk 4:18). Such language is the language of warfare. Furthermore, Jesus called Satan "the ruler of this world" (Joh. 14:30). In a similar vein, Paul refers to Satan as "the evil god of this world" who blinds people to God's Good News (2Co. 4:4) and the Apostle John said, "the whole world is under the rule of the Evil One" (1Jn 5:19)

Westerners tend to feel that such beliefs need not be taken seriously since, we believe, these so-called gods are not gods at all but imaginary beings empowered only by superstition. The Bible, however, shows God and His people taking such spirits seriously, though we are warned against giving them honor or fearing them, since the true God is greater and more powerful than these servants of Satan. And, if we are properly related to the true God, we have the authority to protect ourselves from other gods and to confront and defeat them when necessary (Kraft, May 2000).

Postmodern Assault on Time

Finally, the postmodern assault on foundations also includes the intentional undermining of traditional connotations about time, something nearly all of us take for granted. Western epistemological foundations have long been founded upon the lineal notion of time -- that there is a beginning and ending, that life is un-repeatable and that death is somehow final -- notions that all originate in the biblical worldview. This attack on the long accepted notions of time is part of the postmodern, deconstructive and anti-foundational character. Because postmodernity endorses an anti-historical and anti-linear historiography, it accords with pre-modern, animistic, Pagan and Eastern worldviews, which makes the postmodern, eclectic blending of beliefs and worldviews all the easier.

Michel Foucault argued the modernist framework was a vain illusion, an invention of history and language -- all products of power relations. Postmodernists also argue that reality and time are not limited to the transcendental boundaries that Western metanarratives have imposed upon society, especially those derived from the Bible. Postmoderns (again) believe such notions require deconstruction, so the human mind may once again soar freely, and that after deconstruction, a better way of thinking may be established. For postmoderns, things like cyber reality are credible alternatives, where the bending and blending of different dimensions of time and reality, make fantasy and reality the same. This relativistic denigration and disorientation of time, opens wide the door for Westerners to embrace Eastern, and/or pre-biblical concept of cyclical time.

The long-accepted notion of linear time originates in the Bible, which makes clear that time is not cyclical: rather, that time has a beginning and an ending. The Bible introduced the linear progressive notion, and has for millennia challenged and changed the cyclical time notion. Because postmoderns are incredulous toward traditional meta-narratives like the Bible, they seek to deconstruct them and the notions they promote. Postmoderns thus encourage the embrace of non-traditional notions, such as those found in Eastern philosophies and a host of other pre, and non-biblical notions, which are rooted in a time cyclical worldview. In a manner somewhat reminiscent of the medieval humanists, return

to ancient Greek writings, the postmoderns encourage the deconstruction, and/or disestablishment of long-held traditions, especially *via* the re-visitation of ancient notions. This would include the Greeks, for example, who according to Ron Nash, did not promote reincarnation, but certainly did believe in the cyclical notion of history.

The cyclical view of history and existence that underlies belief in reincarnation and karma was a staple of ancient thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. The cyclical view of history, reincarnation, and karma have been essential elements of several Eastern religions. The New Testament is clearly opposed to all such thinking. As the epistle to the Hebrews makes clear, Christianity supplants the pagan cyclical view of history with a linear view. History does not repeat itself; history has a beginning and an end. Christ dies once for the sins of the world. Human beings live but once. It is Appointed unto men once to die, and after this comes the judgment (Heb. 9:27) (Nash, 1992:136).

The circular, or cyclical time notion is deeply rooted in the human psyche, and animistic beliefs, all of which seems to accord with natural seasonal patterns (*i.e.*, crops), that were long ago systematized in a variety of philosophies and religions (*e.g.*, Hindu). This circular time concept is sometimes symbolized by the *uroboros*, the snake chasing its own tail. Time, in this sense, leads back around to where it began and begins all over again. Eastern and various other cultures typically still do embrace a worldview rooted in the cyclical time notion, such as the Hindu doctrine of the *yugas*, or ages, teaches that the universe goes through never-ending cycles of creation and destruction. The Babylonians, ancient Chinese, Aztecs, Mayans, and the Norse, for example, had cyclical calendars. The wheel concept is common where the cyclical worldview of time is embraced. It is especially popular today among resurgent Pagans, Native American religionists, and other spiritualists. The cyclical notion of time differs substantially from the biblical notion, which is linear, or linear progressive, a view reflecting the repetitive traits of human history.

The cycle of birth, growth, decay and death through which plants, animals, human beings and institutions all pass suggests the rotating wheel -- ever in movement yet ever returning upon itself. The wheel offers a way of escape from this endless and meaningless movement. One can find a way to the centre where all is still, and one can observe the ceaseless movement without being involved in it. There are many spokes connecting the circumference with the centre. The wise man will not quarrel about which spoke should be chosen. Any one will do, provided it leads to the centre. Dispute among the different 'ways' of salvation is pointless; all that matters is that those who follow them should find their way to that timeless, motionless centre where all is peace, and where one can understand all the endless movement and change which makes up human history -- understand that it goes nowhere and means nothing (Newbigin, 1969:65, in Anderson, 1984:21).

As mentioned earlier, Lesslie Newbigin's identification of the dualism of public facts and private values has been important. It means that two dimensions of time and reality are now commonly embraced by a growing percentage of the global *populus*. At work and school, time is linear and the modernist, scientific worldview dominates. In their personal life, however, life is often spiritual, multi-dimensionally animated, and time and reality are less defined. Here again, the Western postmodern draws closer to the worldviews that dominate other regions of the globe.

All religions embrace, with variations, some notion of time. For Judaism, Christianity and Islam, time is linear, corporeal life ends at death, and beyond that, there is some sort of judgment, and/or after-life. For these faiths, there is usually no recurrent life dimension, or embrace of cyclical, or circular time dimensions. Postmoderns, pluralists and various others challenge the notion of linear time embedded within the doctrines of the major religions.

My primary concern is that if one discounts the biblical, linear concept of time, then critical biblical doctrines of sin, hell, death, judgment, *etc.*, become meaningless. Even

more, the atoning work of Jesus Christ becomes unnecessary, since life is repeatable, changeable and to some extent manageable. If time changes from biblical-linear back to cyclical-animist, then Christ did not die once for all (*cf.*, Rom. 6:10; Heb. 9:12, 26). If time is cyclical-repetitive, then Christ's death does not cover all dimensions of time, and as the Apostle Paul says, our faith in Him is futile (*cf.*, 1Co. 15:12f). Just as the early church battled the notion of cyclical time, it seems the contemporary church will have to do the same.

Conclusions

The working hypothesis for this project, is again: “I believe postmodernity is a Western cultural dynamic that can, and should be better understood, because of the impact it has already had within Western culture and beyond, and because of its present and future implications for global Christianity.” I believe this project has accomplished its intended task of answering many important questions and concerns about postmodernity, especially as it relates to the Christian faith in the West and beyond. Again, since postmodernity is still dynamic, study and discussion about it continues, and fixed truths about it will necessarily be left to future historians.

To briefly summarize and conclude, the postmodern cultural wave hit full stride in the West around 1970, rooted in discontent with, and rebellion against modernity. Postmodernists, like Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault and Rorty, led this rebellion against what they perceived to be the wrong ideologies and fixed systems that drove and controlled Western societies. They believed these systems were suffocating social life and needed to be changed. To accomplish this, they worked for the deconstruction of cultural pillars, seeking to accomplish their ends through mostly non-violent means. After deconstruction, they hoped to reconstruct a better Western world.

Roland Benedikter believes the postmoderns are products of the European revolutionary impulse, which began years before, with the French Revolution (c.1789). Benedikter suggests this, because most of the postmoderns were French, who had been affected by French colonialism in Algeria. Along those general lines, Ernst Gellner believed, “the more securely a society is in possession of the new knowledge [modernity], the more totally it is committed to its use and is pervaded by it, the more it is liable to produce thinkers who turn and bite the hand which feeds them” (Gellner, 1992:79), as the postmoderns have done.

While deconstruction has done much to challenge and undermine some social institutions and traditions, it has certainly not gone as far as its progenitors had originally hoped. Further, the socio-cultural reconstruction the postmoderns had hoped for has yet

to develop. Even after several decades, postmodernity has really done little to substantively alter modernity, which has proven to be far more resilient than postmoderns anticipated. Even as previous romantic movements (*e.g.*, Existentialism) failed to dislodge modernity as the primary worldview in the West, so now the postmodern cultural wave seems to have failed.

Postmodernity -- in conjunction with Post-Christendom and Post-Colonialism -- has really been most successful in dislodging the moral and religio-cultural hegemony of Christianity from broader Western societies. Further, as the faith has grown in the non-West, it has diminished in all Western nations, save North America. Even there, these powerful cultural dynamics have produced significant changes in the faith.

While Christianity is still quite influential in the West, the faith no longer holds a place of social privilege, as it did for centuries under the sway of Christendom. Christian moral imperatives are not as widely respected, nor deeply ingrained in Western societies as they once were. The growing division between facts and values that Lesslie Newbigin identified several decades ago is an ever-present reality. Science, the true passionate expression of modernity, continues its progressive march to 'save the world,' virtually unabated. The realm of personal values, however, has changed significantly over the past several decades.

Western thought reached real frustration and emptiness in extreme postmodernism. Yet, the postmoderns have never been able to suggest a better way forward: they have always, only been critics. Because of this, the postmodernity is waning, little able to continue its battle against modernity and all the other long-established institutions and traditions so deeply rooted in Western societies. Again, as William Lane Craig said, the biggest problem with postmodernism is "that it is so obviously self-referentially incoherent. That is to say, if it is true, then it is false. Thus, one need not say a word or raise an objection to refute it; it is quite literally self-refuting" (Craig, in Cowan, 2000:182). One might add, postmodernism is self-destructive, shifting sand, wholly unable to support anything substantive, or lasting.

Ernst Gellner concluded: "Postmodernism as such doesn't matter too much. It is a fad which owes its appeal to its seeming novelty and genuine obscurity, and it will pass soon

enough, as such fashions do” (Gellner, 1992:71). To Gellner, postmodernity was the currently fashionable form of [philosophical] relativism, and while it has affected many, is already passing. Indeed, postmodernism has been passé in France for some years now, replaced by a generation of ‘neo-conservatives,’ a counter-trend some say is developing across the West.

Yet, postmodernity will leave its mark, mostly expressed in greater moral relativism and religious pluralism in Western societies. Many would argue these are necessary components of free societies, yet upon what moral foundation will these societies be founded, since science readily admits its inherent inability to supply morality? As Ernst Gellner said, monotheistic religions endorse unique truths, and still need to be a factor in Western cultural foundations. In the end, I believe postmodernity, post-colonialism, and post-Christendom have challenged Christianity to be influencers, not controllers.

How should Christianity respond to postmodernity and its remnant cultural features? As philosopher William Lane Craig has said, Christianity should not realign its witness to the world in accordance with the present postmodern fad. “Such a realignment would be not only unnecessary, but counterproductive, for the abandonment of objective standards of truth and rationality could only undermine the Christian faith in the long run by making its call to repentance and faith in Christ but one more voice in the cacophony of subjectively satisfying but subjectively vacuous religious interpretations of the world” (Craig in Cowan, 2000:183). Arguing the case for Christianity using postmodern standards will only make the faith weaker in the process. Postmodernity does require an apologetic response, but not one that abandons reason in the process.

Where the grand scheme of things is concerned, postmodernity is hardly the ‘shaking’ God yet promises to do (*cf.*, Psa. 96:13; Heb. 12:25-29), and I am not suggesting that postmodernity is some divine wind. Yet, postmodernity, post-Christendom and post-colonialism have all worked to make significant changes in Western Christianity. The faith has largely been disestablished from its Christendom position. Further, the exposure of this Western religious facade has produced some positive results. Postmodernists “are right to warn us of the dangers of using language to gain power over others, to recommend the importance of story and narrative, and to warn against the historical

excesses of scientism and reductionism that grew out of an abuse of modernist ideas” (Craig, 2003:152). The key here is modesty before God, who may seem distant, but is never far. May God grant especially His own, truth, peace, and especially -- humility.

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The University of Zululand is a leading comprehensive institution offering career-focused undergraduate and postgraduate education, including wide ranging research opportunities, with a focus that is both local and global.

The University of Zululand was established in the Extension of University Education Act of 1959, which extended tertiary education to the previously under-served ethnic homeland regions of South Africa.

Teaching on the campus began in 1960 with 41 students (36 of them men) in two faculties, education and arts, and an academic staff of 14. Officially opened in March 1961, the institution was called Zululand University College and was affiliated with the University of South Africa. The school attained academic autonomy in January 1970, when it became the University of Zululand.

Zululand's international character is evident in the composition of its student population, hailing regionally from Swaziland, Lesotho, Nigeria, Tanzania, Cameroon, Ghana and Kenya, and from as far away as Pakistan, Europe and the United States.

UZ partners with tertiary educational institutions in the United States and Europe. These include the University of Mississippi, Radford University, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, Jackson State University and Chicago State University.

The main Campus is situated in Kwadlangezwa, 19 km south of Empangeni and about 142 km north of Durban off the N2 National Road on the KwaZulu-Natal North Coast. The University also maintains several Satellite Campuses.

The Department of Theology and Religion Studies collaborates with seven external institutions, at locations as far afield as Randburg and Benoni in Western Cape.

### About the author

John (b.1957) lives in the midwestern region of the United States, and has been involved in business and Christian work most of his life.

He has been happily married to Barbara since 1977, and is the father of Melissa and Sean -- the apples of his eye.

Wanting to be a 'global Christian,' John was honoured to study with his South African brethren.

Also invited to study for his doctorate at the University of South Africa, the University of Pretoria, and the University of Wales, John chose to study at UZ.