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Communicating the Gospel
in a Pluralistic World



SESSION 3

The Influence of Postmodernity on Religious Pluralism

CLT Bible Study

The Influence of Postmodernity on Religious Pluralism

Certificate of Lay Ministry
Communicating the Gospel in a Pluralistic World
Dr. David Ackerman, editor
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The Influence of Postmodernity on Religious Pluralism

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INTRODUCTION

Prince Albert of England organized the Crystal Palace Exhibition in 1851 in Hyde Park. He gave a speech at the opening of the exhibition. His speech showed the confidence people had at that time in human reason and progress: “Nobody who has paid any attention to the peculiar features of our present era will doubt for a moment that we are living at a period of most wonderful transition, which tends rapidly to accomplish that great end to which indeed all history points—the realization of the unity of mankind.”

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- discuss some of the reasons we speak of postmodernity and the crisis of modernity that gave rise to postmodernity;
- describe the main characteristics of postmodernity that relate to religious pluralism and why respect for the many religious stories is so important in a postmodern world;
- explain why postmodernity is more favorable to the role of religion in human life than was modernity; and
- show how Wesleyan-Holiness theology is well positioned for Christian mission and service in a postmodern age.

The Influence of Postmodernity on Religious Pluralism

INTRODUCTION

Prince Albert of England organized the Crystal Palace Exhibition in 1851 in Hyde Park. He gave a speech at the opening of the exhibition. His speech showed the confidence people had at that time in human reason and progress: “Nobody who has paid any attention to the peculiar features of our present era will doubt for a moment that we are living at a period of most wonderful transition, which tends rapidly to accomplish that great end to which indeed all history points—the realization of the unity of mankind.” His words suggest the optimism of how human reason and progress had reached a high point in the 19th century.

Quoted in J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger than It Used to Be* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 18-19.

History tells the story of the birth of new ideas and movements. It shows how many factors come together to create something new. History also tells how things come to an end. New ideas always challenge old ideas. The foundations, once thought secure, begin to shake and crack. People wonder about previous generations and what they thought was obvious and permanent. What was once thought certain and secure is questioned. A new generation asks, “How could they ever have believed that?”

We can be assured that someday, someone will ask that question of our generation. Many believe we are now passing from one major historical era to another. The old era was modernity, and the new era is called postmodernity (“post” means “after”). Others disagree, saying we are just seeing major changes in modernity. The disagreement is not surprising. When something new happens, people will disagree about how to interpret it. They can see the same thing but disagree about what it means.

The goal of this session is not to debate terms or whether our era should be called postmodern. We will use this term for convenience. It is obvious that big changes have taken place. It is obvious that our time is different than previous generations and what was described in the last session. In many ways, what we see today is a revolt against some of the central ideas of modernity.

One era of history does not quickly disappear and be replaced by another. There is a slow transition, with many characteristics and influences continuing to a new era. The past continues to influence the present and future. Eras overlap at their beginnings and endings. A new era may begin even as the old area is at its peak. In some cases, two eras may exist at the same time. People in the same nation can be part of two different eras. Not everyone in a culture accepts or follows new ideas. For example, even today, a “Flat Earth Society” exists that a person can join.

The media and secular higher education have a bias more influenced by modern thinking than postmodern. Those who grew up decades ago are more influenced by modernity than those in university today. How and when we were raised determines a lot about our thinking. I did not live through the Great Depression. But a friend of mine did. His experience shaped how he spent money in ways that seem strange to me. Likewise, postmodernity may be difficult for some people to understand. Brian McLaren describes himself as one who is migrating. Many of us will feel like we are on a journey and may not feel comfortable with new ideas. However, those of us who want to serve the gospel of Jesus Christ have the responsibility to learn about these trends. Some people live in the house of modernity, and others are just trying to find the door.

This session cannot describe postmodernity in detail. The books mentioned later in the bibliography give a more detailed introduction. This session focuses on the features of postmodernism that directly impact religious pluralism and the message of salvation in Jesus. Dr. Truesdale believes the postmodern era will be more hospitable to religion than modernity. We should not lament that the old days are gone but eagerly wait for what new things the Holy Spirit will do through the church. Many of the views from modernity that opposed religion are now being challenged. There is more openness to religion than before. “How much space does the Church need?” asked Dietrich Bonhoeffer as the Nazis were following him. “Only as much space as it takes to bear witness to the gospel of God.”

The new openness to religion fits well with the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition. This tradition is optimistic that the Holy Spirit is at work spreading the gospel. Success in our mission does not depend on human ability, reason, or coercion. We can be assured that God’s grace is working to draw people to himself. Like Paul the apostle, with God’s help, we can be flexible and resourceful as we share the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

A DEFINITION



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To begin with, it would be good to define postmodernity. The problem is that there is no definition everyone agrees on. Federico de Osnis was the first to use the term in a Spanish essay in 1934. Arnold Toynbee introduced it more broadly to the English-speaking world in 1954. Even though many people use the word, there is no agreement on what it means or how to define it. One of the reasons for this lack of definition is that postmodernity is still developing. We may only be experiencing its infancy.

Brian McLaren suggests that one good way to begin to understand postmodernity is to write the word “post” (meaning “after”) in front of each of the ten characteristics of modernity (identified in Session 2). The early stages of an era are marked by stating what was wrong with the previous one. It takes time for a new vision to develop. As postmodernity influences cultures, it appears that it will not have only one way of thinking but will be pluralistic.

Born In Crisis

Postmodernity was born because of a severe crisis in modernity. Many events led to this crisis. The crisis began as early as the late 18th and early 19th century in the Romantic movement. This movement reached its peak in the first half of the 18th century. It emphasized the individual, emotions, awe, and wonder. The romanticists reacted against the Enlightenment’s overemphasis on reason. Postmodernism has a similar reaction to the claims about reason made during modernity. Reason and human knowledge go too far in their claims of being objective. The Enlightenment stressed studying the world as an object using reason and the scientific approach. The results and discoveries could be verified. Postmodernism has shown that many of these claims actually cannot be proven or supported. The charge is that modernity went too far in these claims.

Let us look at some of the changes that have come about with the rise of postmodern thinking and their effects on religious pluralism. It is helpful to realize that postmodernism is complex. There is a lot more to it than what is mentioned below.

Sources of the Crisis in Modernity

One source of the crisis of modernity was that people recognized that reason could be abused.

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Instead of liberating humanity, reason can also enslave. For example, with the great advancements of the Industrial Revolution, many workers—men, women, and even children—were treated as disposable tools to get a job done. The advancements were wonderful, but many people suffered to bring them.

It was thought that the growing cities were a mark of the success of modernity. But these cities brought many problems. Poverty in the inner cities increased. Robber barons gained great wealth and neglected justice and community. Urbanization and industrialization brought polluted air, rivers, and drinking water. Natural resources were plundered, depleted, and destroyed. Disrespect and contempt for non-Western cultures grew.

Another source of the crisis was two world wars within half a century. These major conflicts led to the death of millions of people and shook confidence in reason and progress. Reason failed to deal with deeper human problems and turned out to intensify them. The two world wars showed how reason could be used for evil, destroy society, and crush the human spirit. The world watched as reason was used to develop machines for killing soldiers and civilians in large numbers never before seen.

The Enlightenment began in Europe, but Europe turned out to be the place of great savagery and destruction. Europe was far from the lofty goals of the Enlightenment. Instead of reason proving to be the salvation of humanity, it turned out to be the tool for ruin. Certain nations sought to control others through military conquest. Strong nations ignored the well-being of weaker nations. These wars showed that the human spirit is corrupt and damaged by original sin.

Back in 1949, George Orwell's famous dystopian novel *1984* made this point using secular language. Orwell's narrative shows how humanity can be manipulated and destroy itself. Science was supposed to be free of bias and lead to the promised land of human development. But science and reason cannot stop original sin. Science can be enormously beneficial, but it can also enhance sin. Science can be helpful, but it can also be used for greed, national interests, and gaining wealth on Wall Street. No human door can keep original sin out. The optimism and belief of the Enlightenment that reason could discover and solve all problems proved to be a myth. Postmodernism shows that reason is not the answer but often only creates more problems. Careful study shows the biases and agendas of those who do the so-called reasoning.

Other events show the crises created by modernity that opened the door to postmodernism. In science, Einstein's theory of relativity questioned the certainties of Newton's physics and the developments it brought. Many other examples of

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changes and challenges could be listed. Here are some brief examples. European colonialism ended with many nations claiming independence. Non-Western cultures began stressing their own values and beliefs. There is a new awareness that language does not always accurately describe what people mean. Eastern religions have become attractive to many in the West. The interpretation of human nature in modernity has been questioned. These new challenges raise questions about the claims of modernity that have influenced many disciplines and subject areas, including psychology, religion, the cinema, philosophy, art, architecture, music, etc.

CHARACTERISTICS OF POSTMODERNITY AS THEY AFFECT RELIGIOUS PLURALISM



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Brian McLaren thinks that we can talk about what postmodern society is like without having to learn too much about the philosophy behind it. We will follow his suggestion. In this session, we will use the ideas of postmodernity without having to learn about the people who came up with them. There are three things about postmodern society that are most important when it comes to religious pluralism.

A Resurgence of Religion, often in New or Unconventional Forms

The first characteristic of postmodernity is that religion is becoming more popular but often in new and different ways. It is unclear if this new interest in religion has led to the collapse of modernity or if modernity has opened the door to a “return of the sacred.” People are turning to religion, though outside of traditional religious groups and institutions. Christianity is growing more in the southern hemisphere than in the north. The global south is sometimes called the “two-thirds world.” Philip Jenkins wrote about this in his book *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). Christianity is changing and growing in ways that people in the West might not realize. David Aikman wrote about the rapid growth of Christianity in China in his book *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Pub., 2003).

In the past few decades, there has been a rise in fundamentalism in many religions. This includes Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Modern thinkers like Sigmund Freud, Emile Durkheim, and Karl Marx believed that religion would eventually disappear as people became more rational. However, this has not happened. Instead, people have become more open to the idea of the sacred. This openness is not limited to any single religion or definition of the sacred. Postmodernity has shown that people have a persistent belief in and sensitivity to reality beyond themselves and the wholeness of the human spirit.

Modernity thought it was the best time in history and that reason would triumph. However, people were wrong. The truth is that the human spirit is more complex than people thought. Thinkers of the modern era pursued a secular “closed world” that could be understood and logically studied. Postmodernity showed this to be wrong. People are more open to the sacred and religion. The Western press, such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, etc., has had many articles on religion. This openness to the sacred is not limited to a single religion. Nor does it focus on one specific definition

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of what is sacred. It means that people believe in something beyond themselves, the transcendent. The human spirit recognizes that there is something greater. Modernity failed to see this and could not reject it.

Dismissal of the Notion of Complete Objectivity

A second feature of postmodernity related to religious pluralism is the rejection of the idea of complete objectivity. This idea is now called the myth of objectivity. Objectivity seeks to be unbiased by studying things without being partial or allowing presuppositions to influence the results. Moderns tried to be objective in their reasoning, but their own subjectivity kept showing through. For example, Sigmund Freud's method of psychoanalysis was supposed to be purely objective. But recent writing has shown that it was not. His theories were influenced by his gender, social status, and the people he chose for his research. On November 29, 1993, the cover story of *Time* asked, "Is Freud dead?" Postmodernism rejects the idea of complete objectivity and sees it as impossible.

The old way of thinking was that there was one best way to live life, and everyone should follow it. This idea was called a metanarrative, a story that covers everything. This grand story was influenced by the modern Western viewpoint. From this view, the story of all people could be constructed. This grand story shows how people ought to live and how their cultures should be organized.

Even though many modern thinkers did not believe in religious truth, they replaced it with another truth. They had a new way of thinking about how people should live their lives. This new way of thinking was based on modern ideas and beliefs. It was supposed to be a grand story that everyone could follow, just like the old ways of thinking. The modern way of thinking and acting claimed to know completely and totally based on its defining beliefs. This claim to knowledge was not based on traditional religion. It created its own metanarrative that it believed applied to everything. However, the biases of those who made this claim later became clear.

Postmodernity is different because it does not believe in one grand story that everyone should follow. Instead, it thinks that everyone has their own story to tell. This reaction to modernity by postmodernity is sometimes called "deconstruction" because it takes apart modernity's grand story. The pluralistic approach to reality is due in part to new ideas. For example, new theories of relativity, chaos, and quantum mechanics have raised doubts about long-held certainties in physics. New theories about the Big Bang have raised questions about an expanding universe. Another cause has been the end of European colonialism and the rise of indigenous voices and cultures around the world. Postmodernity has taken apart the old way of thinking and replaced it with something new.

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A change in our understanding of knowledge has also led to the rise of postmodernism. The old myth that knowledge can be discovered without bias has been proven wrong. Knowledge is always known and experienced in a specific context or situation. Knowledge is always influenced by culture and the time period in which a person lives. How and what we know is influenced by where we live, our gender, nationality, education, religion, and other factors. This means that we cannot be completely objective when we learn new things. Instead, we need to be aware of how our experiences and surroundings affect what we know and how we think. Every person is different, and so knowledge will also be different.

Postmodernism is a way of thinking that says there are many different stories and ideas in the world. These stories and ideas come from different people and groups, and they help us understand the world around us. Religions are also specific to a culture, time, and place. Postmodernism says that it is not right to force everyone to follow one religion or one way of thinking. To do so is to oppress or exploit other people. A quick look at popular culture or the media makes this point clear. Religions? Yes. One religion? No! Many paths? Yes. One path for all? No! This idea is shown in a statement by a teacher in Queens, New York: "My way is not right or wrong; it's just my way." Postmodernism also says that there is no one right way to think about religion. Everyone has their own ideas about what religion means to them. It is not right or wrong, just different. We need to respect the beliefs and ideas of others.

Emphasis upon Holism and Community

The third feature of postmodernity that has implications for religious pluralism is its emphasis on the importance of community and seeing people as a whole. By contrast, modernity was marked by breaking things down into smaller parts and focusing on reason and organization. People were reduced to individual objects to be studied. They were encouraged to think for themselves and be independent. This approach led to isolated individualism and separated people from nature. In the 17th century, the philosopher Rene Descartes said that people are made up of two different things: a thinking part and a material part. He thought that the thinking part was more important than the material part.

Postmodernity is different. It looks at persons in a holistic way, as part of a bigger picture. People are connected to other people, communities, themselves, and the environment. They cannot be known apart from these connections. Every aspect of us is connected to others, including our feelings, views, work, religious beliefs, and connection with nature. All these things are important and need to work together to make us who we are.

POSTMODERN IMPLICATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS PLURALISM



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The above material has already hinted at ways that religious pluralism could arise with postmodernity. Let us look at them more closely.

Many Religious Stories or Narratives

We need to understand how postmodern thinking looks at the various stories or beliefs in different religions around the world. In this view, all religions, including Christianity, are considered valid and independent explanations of life. These religions create communities and give meaning to their followers. According to postmodern thinking, there is no absolute way to say one religious story is better than another. The exception is if a religion is harmful and disrespectful to people and their stories and beliefs.

The conclusion is that only people who do not know much would crudely say that their religion should be the story for everyone in the world. The stories of these uninformed people get their meaning and power from the communities that support them. People with knowledge would not try to force their religion on others or try to convert others to their religion. Instead, they would promise to respect all religious stories and the uniqueness of each religion.

Alan Wolfe talks about a Jewish salesman from Queens, New York. The salesman said about his own Jewish practices, "I don't have any problem with what anybody does, as long as they don't tell me what I have to do. So if you want to be involved in something that's very dear to you, that's fine, but don't sit there and tell me about something that is clearly an option in life, that I have to be doing it, and I should be doing it."

This attitude poses some significant challenges to evangelism. It also provides new opportunities for spreading the gospel through the help of the Holy Spirit. Only the Holy Spirit can convincingly encourage someone to joyfully become part of God's grace shown in Christ. Proving the gospel will require support from living in a way that reflects God's kingdom and being changed by the Holy Spirit.

The Witness of a Transformed Life

The next aspect of postmodernity that affects religious pluralism is something Wesleyans should be happy about. It fits well with our belief in how God's grace works.

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It witnesses to our message of the transformed life. The challenge of modernity was to prove who was right, a fight for rational control. The challenge of postmodernity is how to live a good life. This world cares less about being convinced by our thoughts and more about being attracted by how we live. Lives filled with love, showing the life and character of Christ, become the best argument for Christianity. Reason can help us think about faith or work through our faith, but real life is what really counts.

Narratives Must Listen to Each Other

A third point is that different stories need to listen to each other. Some Christians might see this as betraying the gospel. “Why listen when you already have the truth?” Being quiet is the best way we can help the gospel. Why listen? We listen to understand the meaning of other people’s religious stories. We want to hear how God is working in them and their culture. God may be doing more than we expect or limit. We do not listen to be clever or sneaky to trick people into unwanted conversion.

An Adequate Appreciation for the Various Religions

A fourth implication is postmodern thought about holism. To truly understand different religions, we need to look at their whole context. We can look at everything that shapes how they see the world, people, nature, and what they see the world, people, nature, and what they consider sacred. If we only use Western ideas to understand a religion, we are likely to get it wrong and will not really communicate well.

We should not expect new Christians in places like China or Afghanistan to give up their culture to be Christian. And we certainly should not expect them to think that being Christian is the same as being Western. Since the days of the Early Church, Christians have used parts of their own cultures to express their faith. Sometimes, some of us think being Christian is the same as being Western, but we need to remember that this is not true.

THE TOWER OF BABEL: MODERNITY BUILT THE TOWER



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THE TOWER OF BABEL: MODERNITY BUILT THE TOWER—NOW POSTMODERNITY MUST FACE THE CHALLENGE OF CONDEMNING THE “UNSAFE STRUCTURE”

MICHAEL HORTON (Selected, Paraphrased)

Where Now? Suggestions for the Way Forward

Cultural wars erupt between those who are culturally conservative and those who are culturally liberal. The battle is also between those who follow Judeo-Christian values and those who do not believe in religion. Like an earthquake, the real problems are much deeper than what we see on the surface of politics, morality, and entertainment. The deep tectonic plates of culture are shifting. If we ignore these deep issues, society will keep changing while we are busy dealing with one problem after another.

Before going further, it is important to understand that even though we are fighting in culture wars, we are not doing much to challenge secularism. If secularism is just another word for being worldly, and modernity is a type of worldliness, then both conservative and liberal Christians are equally guilty. Despite what many people think, recent efforts by evangelicals to fight secularism are not being successful in changing the culture's path toward a new dark age. We might think that conservative activism is fighting against secularism, but evangelical Christianity is just as influenced by the modern world as liberal Protestantism. Let me give you some examples.

Relativism and Fragmentation

If we think of modernity as a ten-story stone government building, a public housing project, or rows of identical houses, then postmodernism is like your average shopping mall. Instead of everything being orderly and the same, the mall is full of stores that all look different from each other. There are many different styles that conflict. Nothing looks the same. This is different from the old malls from the 60s and 70s, where all the stores looked the same except for their signs. As Peter Fuller said,


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“The west front of Wells Cathedral, the Parthenon pediment, the plastic and neon signs of Caesar’s Palace, Las Vegas, even the hidden intricacies of a Mies van der Rohe curtain wall: all are equally ‘interesting.’”

Is this not how many evangelical Christians also see truth? What happens when people start asking about different styles of worship? Both Bach’s “St. Matthew Passion” and Kendrick’s “Shine, Jesus, Shine!” are seen as equally ‘interesting.’ One could go to a Wesleyan, Lutheran, Reformed, Pentecostal, Baptist, Roman Catholic, mainline liberal, conservative evangelical, charismatic, or non-charismatic service and hear the same sermon and have the same worship experience. This is not because the Spirit has brought new unity to the divided church, which is the Body of Christ. Rather, it is more because of the division of the age.

In other words, churches do not focus on their unique beliefs and worship practices anymore. This may be because these things are not important to them. The Spirit does not unify them but the appeal of the marketplace. They are all following the same trends in preaching, worship, and outreach because they are trying to appeal to what people want. Some leaders are happily using Allan Bloom’s book *Closing of the American Mind* to talk about morality. They do not realize, however, that Bloom criticizes the same trends these successful churches are following.

Human-Centered Orientation and Belief in Human Nature

People tend to believe in themselves and their ability to improve their own lives. This is called Pelagianism, the belief that we can save ourselves. We can “pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps.” In fact, 86% of America’s evangelical Protestants believe that “God helps those who help themselves.” And 77% of evangelicals believe people are basically good.

This means that most evangelical Christians in this country are Pelagian and secular. I remember when Robert Schuller suggested we work together to fight against our common enemy of secular humanism. This is the same man who said the Reformation was wrong because it focused on God instead of people.

Because of this focus on people, we see a lot of human-centered ideas in preaching and Christian discussions. For example, most books in a Christian bookstore are about everyday life, like self-esteem, recovery, raising kids, personal fitness, happiness, success, and political victory.

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This focus on ethics and moral behavior instead of theology and Christ was once something that liberals were known for.

Even when it comes to evangelism, which one might expect to be all about God and Christ, people often use language that is human-centered: “Here’s what God will do for you if you say ‘yes.’” I would not be surprised if, one day, an evangelist says, “Try God. And if you are not completely satisfied, simply return the unused portion for a full refund.” Everything from the Law to the gospel is sold for its usefulness to the buyer. People do not see the Law as showing God’s personal character and the gospel as showing his plan to save us.

The Me Generation is now in power in Washington, D.C. Rebelling against authority and tradition is more accepted there than the campus protests of the 60s. Evangelical activists have emphasized this 60s-rooted rebellion. However, they do not realize that the evangelical movement itself is a massive rebellion against authority. It has neglected the creeds, confessions, institutional church, church discipline, etc. It has also rebelled against tradition. It has neglected theology, liturgy, and classic hymns. James Dobson reminds us of the bad effects of Stanford’s radical student cheer, “Hey, hey, ho, ho, Western civilization has got to go.” However, the same tradition of our Western religious inheritance from the ancient church and the Reformation is being happily thrown out of conservative evangelical churches.

And why is this happening? For the same reason, the radicals did not like the rest of Western culture: It is old. It is seen as irrelevant, impractical, limiting, and confining. It does not let us express ourselves freely. The same feelings that lead liberals to abandon traditional values lead conservatives to abandon traditional worship.

Recently, I was reading some church growth literature. Under the section on values, a number of the mega-churches said at the top of the list, “We value individualism and personal expression. We don’t want to tie people down to doctrines, rituals, and rules.”

The self-centeredness of modernity is alive and well in the evangelical community. If the evangelical activists can be sad about the rise of the Me Generation in Washington, surely the rest of us can also be sad about the rise of the Me Generation in the leadership of the evangelical movement...

**NOTES***Conclusion*

The postmodern people are disappointed modernists. They believe that logic and being clever cannot bring happiness. They are skeptical about the big promises made by politicians or certain groups. They do not accept the claims of idealistic, utopian movements. It does not matter whether liberal or conservative or whether the focus is on community or individual freedoms. They like things to be mixed up and different, not orderly and logical.

We must ask the postmodern people if they have just swapped one set of beliefs for another and if they have replaced their new ideas of individualism with the older ideas of logic and reason? They know what is wrong with modern ideas, but they have nothing to replace them except rejection. They are against universal systems for all, idealistic utopian progress, and absolute truths but do not know what to substitute for these. They have no ideas of their own. There are countless proposals and ideas, but there is no clear path. These many ideas may be needed in a system that is fragmented, divisive, and contradictory. However, there is openness to faith and community-based ways of understanding the world. This can include an interest in the Bible. This new openness avoids the modern arrogance of individual theologians and philosophers reinventing theology from scratch...

In our day, the basic truths of many core Christian ideas have become important. These include what the Bible teaches about Creation, God's Sovereignty and Transcendence, Providence, Incarnation, Redemption, Justification, the work of the Holy Spirit, the Second Coming of Christ, and the Completion of all things at the end. These doctrines will provide a rich source of answers for a culture looking for deeper truths. In Christianity, God reveals his name, who he is, and his plan to save us through the living and written Word...

Intellectuals are wondering where evil comes from and how to understand it. Secular psychologists ask, "What happened to the idea of sin?" Popular national magazines have cover stories on sin and grace. Those who will matter most and be most relevant in this age will probably be those who can talk about the big questions that were important during the Reformation. No religious idea will be taken seriously unless it connects with the real world and makes a difference in people's lives.

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Therefore, it is not only about how to explain doctrines, like justification, but how it is preached. Also important are how Christian freedom is lived out, our role in the world, the problem of evil and suffering, and the fear of death. After every doctrine is presented, we need to ask ourselves what the people of today are thinking: “So what? Why does it matter?”

Orthodox ministers need to get over their fear of sermons that apply the truth to real life. They need to apply the truth of salvation to life here and now. Pietistic evangelicals need to go back to the theology and the text of the Bible so that they have something to apply.

This is not the time to give in to confusion. It is a time to go back to “the faith once and for all delivered to the saints.” May God give us his Spirit to meet the challenges and opportunities before us.

Michael Horton is the editor-in-chief of *Modern Reformation* and a CAPO fellow. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

CONCLUSION

In the highly pluralistic, postmodern world we live in, the Holy Spirit has prepared us to share the good news of the gospel with those who are willing to see and listen. I am convinced that if we, in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition, pay close attention to what is happening around us, we can effectively share the good news in the Lord’s vineyard. We should greet postmodernity as a great opportunity and not as a threat.

FOR FURTHER READING:

The following four books are recommended for reading about postmodernism from an evangelical perspective:

- Roger Lundin, *The Culture of Interpretation* (Eerdmans)
- Gene Veith, *Postmodern Times* (Crossway)
- Thomas Oden, *After Modernity . . . What?* (Zondervan)
- David Wells, *God in the Wasteland* (Eerdmans)

APPLICATION

**NOTES**

1. Spend some time exploring various internet sites for the word “postmodernism.”
2. Write a reflection paper based on the following questions. Be prepared to share that paper with your mentor. What features of postmodernity are most negative for the Christian faith?
 - What features of postmodernity are most positive for the Christian faith?
 - Do you see postmodernity as a crisis or opportunity for the church?

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NOTES

1. Modernity and Postmodernity may continue to coexist for some time.
 - A. True
 - B. False

2. Postmodernism is more interested in the right idea than how to live.
 - A. True
 - B. False

3. Postmodernity is more open to the idea and practice of religion than modernity.
 - A. True
 - B. False

4. The wide use of the term postmodernism reflects the fact that there is a broad consensus for a definition of what postmodernism is.
 - A. True
 - B. False

5. With which of the following is postmodernism NOT disillusioned?
 - A. science
 - B. the idea of objectivity
 - C. community
 - D. reason

6. Postmodernism offers promising opportunities for the gospel.
 - A. True
 - B. False

7. The center of Christian growth in the world is moving to _____.
 - A. middle America
 - B. the cities
 - C. the southern hemisphere
 - D. Europe

8. Postmodernism places emphasis on community.
 - A. True
 - B. False

9. Moderns and postmoderns still think that, in one way or another, we can save ourselves.
 - A. True
 - B. False

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. Review the exam questions and answers. Discuss any issues or questions the participant raises for you.
2. What features of postmodernity are most negative for the Christian faith?
3. What features of postmodernity are most positive for the Christian faith?
4. Do you see postmodernity as a crisis or an opportunity for the church?