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DISCIPLESHIP  
PLACE

Communicating the Gospel in a  
Pluralistic World



**SESSION 2**

The Influence of the Modern Era  
on Religious Pluralism

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# The Influence of the Modern Era on Religious Pluralism

## SESSION OVERVIEW

**Influence of the Modern Era on Religious Pluralism**

**Postmodernity Must Face the Challenge of Condemning the “Unsafe Structure”**

**Application**

**Exam**

**Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

## LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- understand the characteristics of modernity
- understand why modernity’s trust in reason often fostered a suspicion of religion in all its forms
- understand why many modern thinkers dismissed religion as a retardant to human progress, and thereby relegated it to the margins of life
- understand how modernity could in some ways undercut the claims of any religion to be the true one

# The Influence of the Modern Era on Religious Pluralism

## INTRODUCTION

To understand the larger historical, cultural, religious, and philosophical context in which religious pluralism is cast, and in which the gospel is to be proclaimed, we need to observe how the modern era and postmodernity have influenced, and continue to influence, religious pluralism. The modern era was built largely upon a confidence in human reason as the most dependable way to understand the cosmos, religion, history, the mind, morality, philosophy, the political order, and just about everything else humans consider important. Modernity characteristically believed all of human life could be harmoniously organized through the right use of reason. The tools necessary for doing so are within human reach. Many representatives of the modern spirit either greatly reduced the sphere of importance for religion or were confident religion has no good future at all.

Sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) thought religion could still play a beneficial social role even though its erroneous claims regarding God's reality have been exposed. William James (1843-1910), the American philosopher, thought belief in God is preferable to atheism, not because there is solid reason to believe, but because believing in God makes the world appear more warm and full of meaning. Religious faith is practical. But Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was certain religion has no good future. Religion springs from a universal neurosis that can be cured if its truth is confronted. And Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-72) thought religion is the fruit of human projection, a projection that began as humankind emerged.

It is important to note that modernity and skepticism regarding religion are not synonymous. Many thinkers and leaders in the modern era have insisted on the fundamental importance of religion and have seen no necessary conflict between modernity and religious faith. For these, orthodox Christian faith and modernity are reconcilable. They view modern science, for example, as a remarkable window for observing the mighty works of God.

That said, for many persons—especially among leading intellectuals in Europe and North America—the defining tenets of modernity did assume the qualities of an all-embracing ideology of religious proportions. For purposes of understanding how some characteristics of modernity contributed to the emergence of religious pluralism, we will focus on modernity in its more comprehensive and ideological form. But we will remember that by doing so we are not speaking for all modern thinkers and leaders. Nor by critiquing modernity are we including all it did or did not accomplish.

Despite the troubling aspects of the modern period, much of the world has richly benefited from modernity. Democratic institutions, the sciences, technology, access to education for all children, the beneficial dimensions of the industrial revolution, and the wondrous drugs and medicines that help us overcome formerly lethal diseases are some of the more notable benefits. Some of the fruits of modernity have enhanced the proclamation of the gospel and have provided important tools for studying the Scriptures. In the Wesleyan tradition, we do not exalt reason above Scripture, but we do rely heavily upon a disciplined use of reason for proclaiming the gospel of our Lord. In positive ways, the modern era has contributed to that.

The following story appeared in the *Washington Times* on December 8, 2002.

#### Suit Seeks to Allow Wiccan's Invocation

The Virginia chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union is suing the Chesterfield County Board of Supervisors for refusing to allow a Wiccan leader to give the invocation at the start of its meeting. The lawsuit was filed in federal court in Richmond and says the Board of Supervisors is violating the constitutional ban on state-sponsored religion by denying Wiccan priestess Cynthia Simpson the opportunity to offer an invocation. The lawsuit also says the board's policy violates the constitutional guarantee of equal protection. "They are supposed to be making laws, not theological judgments," said the Rev. Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, which has joined in the suit with the ACLU. "They do not believe Wicca to be a religion like Christianity, but government officials cannot be making these decisions."

The board regularly opens its meetings with a voluntary invocation by a leader of a Judeo-Christian denomination. Earlier this year, Miss Simpson asked the Board of Supervisors to allow her to give an invocation. She was denied. "Chesterfield's nonsectarian invocations are traditionally made to a divinity that is consistent with the Judeo-Christian tradition," wrote Chesterfield County Attorney Steven Micas in a letter to Miss Simpson denying her request.

- Mary Shaffrey

## INFLUENCE OF THE MODERN ERA ON RELIGIOUS PLURALISM



### NOTES

We have briefly traced pluralism's historical development in the Western world. The influence of two major historical developments needs to be examined. In the next two sessions, we will examine the impact of modernity and postmodernity on religious pluralism. Our examination is brief and admittedly limited.

Establishing exact dates for the beginning and close of the modern era is impossible because neither the point of its beginning nor its ending is agreed upon. Historical eras emerge and decline. Placing dates on their tombstones is usually arbitrary. In fact, whether or not we should even speak of the end of the modern era, and if so, what that means, are the subject of intense debate. Some place the beginning of modernity as early as the 16th century, while others place it as late as 1850. Those who think the modern era is now being replaced by a postmodern one place the close of modernity somewhere toward the middle of the 20th century. Brian McLaren says we should become accustomed to speaking of the modern era as then and not as now. Postmodern means having experienced modernity, being deeply affected by it, and then in important ways passing beyond.

### A PROFILE OF MODERNITY

Keeping in mind that modernity and religious skepticism are not synonymous, let us observe the characteristics of modernity that contributed to the growth of religious pluralism, as we now know it. Modernity is often spoken of as the Enlightenment Project, so named by philosopher Jurgen Habermas. It was the human intellectual quest to unlock the secrets of the universe in order to master nature for human benefit and to create a better world.

In his book, *A New Kind of Christian*, Brian McLaren outlines 10 identifying characteristics of the modern era. Notice the spirit of confidence, optimism, and universality that characterizes modernity as McLaren sees it.

1. *Conquest and control.* This included bringing the entire world under the sway of Western European philosophy, culture, languages, economics, religion, and technology. Nature was subdued. Native peoples and their cultures were conquered. A thousand problems from bad breath to syphilis were overcome. Conquest also demands control. Moderns committed themselves to controlling people, results, risks, economies, experiments, profit margins, variables, nature, and even the weather.

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2. *The age of the machine.* Mechanization has been the unspoken goal of the modern world, including a mechanized world and people who are themselves viewed as autonomous machines. The universe is intelligible and reason can comprehend it.
3. *An age of analysis.* If the universe and its occupants are intelligible, and if the sciences provide the master screwdriver for taking it apart, then analysis is the ultimate form of thought. Through ever more precise analysis, the universe and its contents become ever more knowable, and in many cases controllable. For many, this entailed an ever-diminishing role for religion, until finally religion could be expected to play no role at all, for man came of age. Religion would contribute nothing to what is really worth knowing. Forms of thought—religion, intuition, systems thinking—other than that based strictly on analytic reason could, by many, be judged inferior and disposable.
4. *An age of secular science.* We are abundantly familiar with how a confidence in the empirical sciences—and the social sciences to a somewhat lesser extent—has dominated the modern era. As the sciences matured, they became more and more secular. That is, they had less and less reason to appeal to any source beyond the observable, empirical world. Mystery could be unpacked by methodical analysis and experimentation. The power of secular science eventually rose above ecclesiastical and religious power. “It’s no wonder that religion was scurrying in retreat in the modern era . . . Perhaps religion could survive in the hidden corners of the private [and subjective] sector, but in the public sector was [largely] seen . . . as a dirty embarrassment, unsanitary, unwelcome, gauche.”
5. *An age that aspired to absolute objectivity.* A hallmark of modernity was belief in the powers and objectivity of reason. Those like Immanuel Kant who placed themselves under reason’s tutelage could confidently expect to escape the enslaving subjectivity of religion, tradition, prejudice, fear, superstition, and guilt the Church had fostered. Objective reason could achieve absolute certainty about the universe, morality, the organization of human affairs, economics, the sources of religion, and so forth. What was as yet not known and worth knowing was ultimately knowable. Ignorance could be replaced by information, mystery with comprehension, and subjective religious beliefs with objective truth. Confidence in the objectivity of reason and the fruits it could bear applied to all persons everywhere. The whole world should be brought under the governance of objective reason. We can easily anticipate the exalted messianic quality of this confidence. Philosophers such as Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), and John Dewey (1859-1952) sought to establish an objective and compelling morality based on reason, unhitched from religion.

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6. *A critical age.* Armed with the power of objectivity and set free from enslaving subjectivities, moderns could submit everything to critical examination and could thereby debunk every truth claim, religion, scripture, tradition, and culture that did not pass the test of reason. One of the chief characteristics of this process is known as reductionism, which simply reduces everything to nothing but observable causes and effects. For example, a religious conversion experience should be explained in terms of psychology, emotions, childhood influences, and so forth. No transcendent source is needed. The process described here is often spoken of as the secularization of the West, a process that is now very far advanced in Europe, except that Europe is now being flooded with committed Muslims, and to a lesser extent, adherents of other religions. Less and less is religion or the sacred needed for understanding, organizing, and securing human existence.
7. *An age of the modern nation-states and organization.* Since the decline of the Middle Ages and under significant influence from the Protestant Reformation, the modern era has been marked by the organization of nation-states. The colonial powers even created nation-states in parts of the world—Africa and the Middle East—where once there were only tribes. Thanks in large part to trust in reason, the sciences that showed the universe to be orderly, and the industrial revolution, the modern era was marked by ever-increasing efforts to organize that which was believed to be disorderly, including other cultures.
8. *An age of individualism.* For reasons that would require a book to explain, the modern era moved from a focus on we to a focus on I. This is sometimes referred to as modernity's subjective turn. The individual and his or her subjectivity became more conceptually prominent and interesting than the community, or social solidarity. Ironically, increasing fragmentation and increasing organization traveled together. Communities "disintegrated and left their smallest constituent parts—individuals—disconnected and hanging in midair."
9. *An age of Protestantism and institutional religion.* Where religion thrived most in the modern era it did so in its most institutional forms and in its Protestant forms. Oddly enough, the modern era was marked by an explosion of Christian—Protestant and Roman Catholic—missions. There is no denying that missionary activity often went hand-in-hand with, and supported, colonialism. The advance of Christianity was often used to justify the subjugation of non-Christian cultures.



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10. *An age of consumerism.* All the following combined to produce an age of consumerism: capitalism (a market economy and advertising), the industrial revolution, colonialism and exploration, mechanized transportation and farming, and the development of modern monetary and banking systems. Eventually, persons came to be defined and valued largely by gratification: by what the market told them they needed, by the goods they could procure, and by the ease and immediacy of acquisition.

## MODERNITY'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE EMERGENCE OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Now let us explore the bearing modernity has had on the emergence of religious pluralism. We have already begun to anticipate some of the consequences.

In the centers of greatest philosophical, political, economic, cultural, scientific, and intellectual power, religion in all its forms was more and more reduced to the inconsequential margins of human life. For modernity as described in most of McLaren's 10 characteristics, religion simply could not play an important public role. Many modern persons believed that given the history of Christianity in Western Europe since the 4th century, the Christian religion was a lurking danger to human well-being. It represented a tyranny—particularly in the form of clerical privilege in France—from which humankind needed to be set free. We must remember the wars of religion (1562 until the Edict of Nantes in 1598) that had devastated a generation were lodged in Europe's recent memory.

Many moderns believed the truth about all religions, their founders, their practices, and their scriptures had been exposed through the use of the newly acquired tools of historical analysis. Their origin rises no higher than history itself. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) was paraphrased as saying, "The truth is that there is no one here but us, and that's good." The transcendent authority of religion as such was thereby undercut.

Wherever this conclusion holds, the power of any religion to claim it is the true religion above all others has been broken. In an effort to save a place for religion, one may argue one religion is more useful for human well-being than another. But even so, its importance is strictly utilitarian. One may even argue one religion is better suited to a particular culture than is another. Still, its significance is finally utilitarian. Even if in the afterlife we were to discover that one religion is true over all the others, we have absolutely no way of deciding this from within the limitations of history.

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The best course of action for members of each religion is to believe firmly in his or her own faith, but also to place the well-being of the state above all sectarian strife. Members of a religion can best demonstrate their beliefs through honesty, piety, self-discipline, and tolerant respect for others. The surest way to prove the falsehood of one's own religion is to act arrogantly and oppressively toward other religions, or to try to proselytize persons against their own good consciences. Authentic piety and tolerance present the surest paths to peace and admirable religious practice. This was the position the philosopher Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781) presented in the dramatic poem, *Nathan the Wise*. In the story of the three rings, Nathan counsels members of the various religions to compete with each other in generosity. Let their attitudes toward one another be marked with virtue and mild humility, hearty forbearance, and benevolence.

Characteristically, then, to the extent religion has any public role; it should produce good citizens who can contribute to the peace of the realm. Otherwise, religion belongs in the private and subjective domain. It simply has no credentials in realms that rely upon modern criteria for knowledge and importance. If they must, let the religions nourish their narratives, but by all means let them do it in private.

This being true, the public square is certainly no place for religions to debate their superiority. Let them live humbly in each other's presence. There are far greater goods to be achieved in the human community than settling religious squabbles. The tools for human harmony and betterment lie largely with modernity. At best, religion can play no more than a supporting role. We may wonder how such dominant ideas could ever fall into serious disfavor. But that is exactly what has happened.

## POSTMODERNITY MUST FACE THE CHALLENGE OF CONDEMNING THE “UNSAFE STRUCTURE”

MICHAEL HORTON (*SELECTED*)



### NOTES

“Our Time” is the epithet David Wells attaches to modernity and its postmodern successor. Princeton philosopher Diogenes Allen declared, “A massive intellectual revolution is taking place that is perhaps as great as that which marked off the modern world from the Middle Ages.” It is a shift that shapes every intellectual discipline as well as the practice of law, medicine, politics, and religion in our culture.

The following article will serve as a basic introduction to a topic that has become paramount in every university discipline: the collapse of the modern world-view and its much-hailed successor: postmodernism.

Theologian Thomas Oden argues that modernity began with the storming of the Bastille on July 14, 1789, and ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Art philosopher Charles Jencks decided to be even more specific: It ended at 3:32 pm on July 15, 1972, “when the Pruitt-Igoe housing development in St. Louis (a prize-winning version of Le Corbusier’s “machine for modern living”) was dynamited as an uninhabitable environment for the low-income people it housed.” Obviously a lot of people have their own opinions about when the shoe dropped, but most agree that it was fairly recently.

In both of these attempts at fixing a time-line, however, we have a window on the character of this period we call modernity. Why did Oden, for instance, choose the storming of the Bastille as the beginning of the period? The French Revolution was one of a number of revolutions that sought to remake the world from scratch. Universal reason, progress, and planning would eventually create the perfect society in spite of the great costs in terms of genocide as a means to arriving at the gates of Utopia.

Not only economically exhausted, but also spiritually weary, the Soviet empire collapsed under its own weight. It is true that the United States spent the Soviet government out of business, but the spiritual and philosophical issues underlying the collapse are far more significant. When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, it marked the end of the naïve optimism toward ideological movements. Perhaps Utopia would have to wait after all.

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Jencks also gives us a vista from which to view the identity of modernity. From the architectural side of things he reminds us of the silliness of it all. Taking itself far too seriously, ideology, art, politics, religion, education—everything—was drafted into service to the Great Idea. Humility has not been a major characteristic of this era, as human beings have come to believe that they can control the earthly environment and their own destiny, collectively and individually, through technology, politics, military power, and science.

That is why Jencks saw the demolition of the Pruitt-Igoe housing development in St. Louis as a marker. A “machine for living,” this highly rationalized and carefully crafted environment actually ended up being uninhabitable. Ever since the Industrial Revolution, everyone from scientists to artists tended to view the world in mechanical terms, so that even one’s home could be considered a machine that fixes social ills. The building’s demolition, like the collapse of the Berlin Wall, marked the end of the engineered society.

Or did it?

That is the question. Many would argue modernity has not really ended and has actually accelerated, so that even those who decry modernity the most and wear the label postmodern proudly, are often actually hyper-modern in their outlook. This seems to make a great deal of sense when, for instance, so-called postmodernists fail to realize the label itself assumes the idea of progress, one of modernity’s cherished dogmas has come under sharp fire by postmodern academics.

But what is it? What is modernity and why is there such a reaction to it? Where is the Church in all of this and how does our faith relate to this massive upheaval in human thought during our own lifetime? Let us begin with the first question: Defining modernity.

Some people think in more visual than conceptual terms (a postmodern influence), so one way of looking at the modern worldview is to picture Rockefeller Center, city projects, and tract homes. Each in its own way reveals the modern spirit. Modern architecture tends to accent order. Driving down some of the major streets in Washington, D.C., one can see these towers of modernity dominating on either side.

Modernity created these large business-like buildings with little embellishments for a reason. Unlike an old Victorian town square in the Midwest or a Bavarian village, there is no distinct local style. One could be in New York, Nairobi, Singapore, or Sao Paulo and have to look at one’s travel

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itinerary to remember where one is in the morning at the modern hotel. While many styles throughout history have been primarily regional and distinctive, the modern style is global, and is part of a culture obsessed with doing business, making money, selling things, and engineering the New World.

The buildings say that. Tract homes say that. Organized, well-planned communities are part of the modern world-view. Mobility has already uprooted us from our ancestral places, so our new communities are also landmarks of the modern world-view. Each home is basically the same as the next, convenience being more important than charm.

Others, perhaps less visual, may think of modernity in sociological terms. Having already mentioned mobility and rapid transportation (which already makes one feel somewhat rootless), there is also the technological revolution. Neil Postman's *Technopoly* has explored this with such fascinating detail and entertaining prose that every reader of this article should pick up a copy at the next available opportunity. We all assume that technology is a friend, Postman says, for two reasons:

First, technology is a friend. It makes life easier, cleaner, and longer. Can anyone ask more of a friend? Second, because of its lengthy, intimate, and inevitable relationship with culture, technology does not invite a close examination of its own consequences.

It is the kind of friend that asks for trust and obedience, which most people are inclined to give because its gifts are truly bountiful. But, of course, there is a dark side to this friend. Its gifts are not without a heavy cost . . . It creates a culture without a moral foundation. It undermines certain mental processes and social relations that make human life worth living. Technology, in sum, is both friend and enemy.

It is the confidence in the machine, in organized labor, management, and distribution; in science, technology, social, and material progress; in consumerism and marketing and in the strength of economic systems to liberate the human spirit (whether capitalism or communism). This is a large aspect of what is called modernity.

Let us look at some of the most obvious features from a more philosophical perspective. Modernity arose with the triumph of the Enlightenment. The Renaissance and the Reformation had previously unleashed powerful forces toward liberty, civil rights, the freedom of the secular spheres to operate independently of the Church, and had given birth to the rise of modern science, education, and universal literacy.


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However, the Protestant Reformers were just as insistent as the Roman Church on the importance of authority. *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture Alone) meant that the Church could never have the last word, but that the final place for hearing the voice of God was in the pages of Holy Writ. Carefully interpreting the sacred text, the Church was supposed to appeal to gifted teachers to instruct the faithful (and all of them, not just the devoted monks and clergy) in the great truths of the Faith. Individualism was not tolerated as the Reformers criticized the many sects of their day for their disregard of the institutional Church.

However, much changed when Rene Descartes (1596-1650) put forward his famous formula: *Cogito ergo sum*—"I think. Therefore, I am."

Devoted to rationalism, Descartes insisted upon absolute philosophical certainty. There must be a way of knowing things beyond any doubt, Descartes insisted, and therefore he sought a foundation for grounding all human knowledge. That foundation was universal reason. Like Plato, Descartes believed that instead of the world shaping the mind, the mind shaped the world . . . In contrast to Descartes, British empiricist David Hume (1711-76) insisted the only universal foundation for knowledge was empirical observation . . . Knowledge—if that word means anything at all—cannot include mystical leaps or prior judgments. It must be based on empirical observation, and if in our universal experience we know resurrections simply do not occur, then it would be foolish to make room in our thought for such a preposterous possibility of that having happened in first-century Palestine . . . Christianity could not be true—not because its historical truth-claims had been falsified—but because miracles simply do not happen.

There are two major effects of this shift. First, Enlightenment rationalists and empiricists both claimed the possibility of absolute certainty. Either by deduction (rationalism) or by induction (empiricism), the knower could attain certitude. This gave modern men and women a tremendous confidence—indeed, arrogance—in their powers to rebuild the world from scratch on a universal foundation of knowledge. Even religion, now, could be explained in terms of universal ideas that are common to them all. The result was the modern university's religion department, where Christianity, Buddhism, and fern worship are all studied comparatively in order to find the common threads.

Those common threads are simply part of the universal reason that underlies foundationalism. Postmodernism, as we will see, is doing us a favor by dismantling this approach by calling into question the possibility of some grand explanation above these other explanations. Christians believe biblical revelation is the grand explanation (in postmodern parlance, the metanarrative).

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Second, foundationalism made the individual self central. The rationalist, born out of “I think, therefore, I am,” made the knower the center of the universe. My own individual mind is competent to form ideas of what the world is like. Like an ice-cube tray, my ideas could provide a secure grid for understanding everything—apart from revelation or the church.

The empiricist at least turned the focus from the subjective knower thinking and chasing its tail in one’s own mind to the observable world outside. Gravity is a reality apart from the mind. It is not merely an idea the mind imposes on reality, but the nature of reality itself, and the only way we can come to know that reality is by adjusting our ideas to suit the nature of the case. Nevertheless, it was still the knower who was central, and revelation, tradition, and community were simply not factors in the modern experiment.

With the self (i.e., the knower) at the center of the universe, modernity attacked authority, institutions, tradition, and community and instead set up its own authoritarianism, centralized bureaucracies, marketplace whims, and individualist tastes.

Unfortunately, much of the orthodox Christian response to all of this has been to either conform in the interest of relevance, or to simply react and bury one’s head in the sand as if the Enlightenment had never happened. Whatever his failures in terms of coming fully to an orthodox position, Karl Barth (1886-1968), a liberal who became disenchanted with modernity, launched the most unrelenting barrage of artillery against modern liberalism since the triumph of modernity itself. Alexander Pope had declared, “The proper study of Man is Man.”

Barth recoiled at this idea he had once happily embraced. Humanity is not at the center, Barth insisted; God is at the center, and we do not learn the truth about Him, about ourselves, or about redemption, from either deducing things from our rational ideas or by observation of the natural world.

Christianity does not simply echo the best in the world’s religions, united by universal reason or universal experience: It totally contradicts reason and experience. We don’t find God, Barth demanded, but God finds us.

More than anything else, the Enlightenment was an adolescent’s rebellion against his parents’ religion. Colin Gunton observes, “The distinctive shape of modernity’s disengagement from the world is derived from its rebellion against Christian theology. In that sense, there is something new under the sun. Modern disengagement is disengagement from the God of Christendom.”

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This is why Vaclav Havel warned that the foundation of the West is exactly the same as that of the East, and our future is their present: “I believe that with the loss of God, man has lost a kind of absolute and universal system of coordinates, to which he could always relate everything, chiefly himself. His world and his personality gradually began to break up into separate, incoherent fragments corresponding to different, relative, coordinates.”

This makes the breakdown in a coherent theological system within evangelical Christianity (the part of Christendom that at least claims to still be clinging to the historic faith) all the more serious.

It is against this backdrop that a tidal wave of criticism has broken on the shores of the once-cheerful beaches of enlightenment. After two world wars “to end all wars,” existentialism began to turn on modernity with a vengeance. Confidence was lost in the project, and no longer was Utopia seen as an attainable goal. Perhaps suicide is the best way out, Sartre declared.

Where does our culture go for answers? Derrida, Lyotard, and other deconstructionists have argued we are all involved in language games, and Nietzsche was correct in his assertion that all human intercourse is part of the will to power. Language, we are told, is an instrument of cleverly disguised oppression, and this has been most fully exploited by academics interested in advancing various forms of Marxist ideology—Liberation Theology, feminism, etc. Words do not really mean anything in themselves, but in reading between the lines, we can at least anticipate the next move of our opponent. Called the hermeneutic of suspicion, deconstructionism maintains there are no norms for meaning and human language.

The idea of progress, too, has taken some serious hits in recent decades. However, the idea that evil institutions are responsible for corruption rather than sinful human nature and the possibility of engineering a good society through pragmatism and ideology dies hard. It is difficult to determine whether postmodernism is actually modernism at warp speed.

Whether you are a student taking upper-division philosophy or a homemaker trying to figure out why the ground seems to be moving underneath you while you are trying to raise your kids, this topic is terribly relevant. In order to be disciples of our Lord, we must be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves. Before we can “take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5), we must first have thoughts and attempt to understand other thoughts that present themselves as rivals.



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This is not easy to do, but neither is any other aspect of our discipleship. Conversion does not give us an instantly renewed mind any more than it provides us with an instant victory over our sinful affections or actions. Our marriage to Christ, like an ancient marriage between princes of allied nations, is a declaration of war on all that would oppose the peace, liberty, and advancement of Christ's kingdom. May we be given the grace and the resolve to "gird up the loins of [our] minds" (1 Pet. 1:13, KJV), in this age of unprecedented challenges and opportunities.

Michael S. Horton is the president of Christians United for Reformation. Educated at Biola University and Westminster Theological Seminary, Michael is a Ph.D. candidate at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, and the University of Coventry and is the author/editor of eight books, including *The Agony of Deceit*, *Made in America: The Shaping of American Evangelicalism*, *Putting Amazing Back into Grace*, and *Beyond Culture Wars*.

## APPLICATION

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### NOTES

1. Spend some time exploring various internet sites for the word “modernism.” Check out images for Pruitt-Igoe housing to see the housing project that exemplified modernism.
2. Write a reflection paper based on the following questions. Be prepared to share that paper with your mentor.
  - What features of modernity do you think are most positive?
  - What features of modernity do you think are most negative?
  - Do you think of yourself as modern or postmodern?

## EXAM



### NOTES

1. The beginning of the modern era is easy to date.
  - A. True
  - B. False
2. The Enlightenment project hoped to unlock the secrets of the universe to make a better world.
  - A. True
  - B. False
3. This thinker influenced modernity with his emphasis on the authority of empirical observation and rejection of miracles.
  - A. David Hume
  - B. Immanuel Kant
  - C. John Locke
  - D. Rene Descartes
4. Postmodernism accepts the claims of modernism to know the answers.
  - A. True
  - B. False
5. Which of the following is NOT a characteristic of the modern era?
  - A. prominence of secular science
  - B. individualism
  - C. belief in the supernatural
  - D. critical mindset
6. Modernity had a tendency to see the world in mechanical terms.
  - A. True
  - B. False
7. The notion of Truth was a casualty of modernity.
  - A. True
  - B. False
8. Modernity reflected the belief that we could fix the world.
  - A. True
  - B. False

**NOTES**

9. The modern style is global, part of a culture concerned with doing business, making money, and engineering the new world.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
10. This thinker influenced modernity with his assertion, "I think. Therefore, I am."
  - A. David Hume
  - B. Immanuel Kant
  - C. John Locke
  - D. Rene Descartes
  
11. Modernity focuses attention and authority on the community.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
12. Some modern thinkers (i.e., Sigmund Freud) have thought that personal religious faith is a problem that needs to be fixed.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
13. Postmodernism shares modernity's confidence in science.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
14. There is a consensus about when postmodernity began and what it is.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
15. Modernity tended to believe we could find objective truth without religious faith.
  - A. True
  - B. False

## DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT

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**NOTES**

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. Review the exam questions and answers. Discuss any issues or questions they raise for you.
2. What features of modernity do you think are most positive?
3. What features of modernity do you think are most negative?
4. Do you think of yourself as modern or postmodern?