

POSTMODERNISM

By Mark Paynter

Postmodernism has emerged as a phenomenon over the last half of the twentieth century and has arisen largely as a consequence of the information age.¹ Postmodernism can be thought of as the inevitable consequence of skepticism and agnosticism.

Postmodernism is a way of thinking that finds the world confusing, this is because there are no supreme values, moral logic is frowned upon and the sole authority for life is your inner self. Postmodernism think that their view of life is freedom but ultimately it is tyranny to self. Truth ultimately is not objective or verifiable but a matter of preferring one opinion above another. There is no such thing as absolute truth, "To them, everything is relative, and everything could be true"²

Postmodernists believe that it is arrogantly foolish to believe that an almighty God would condescend to speak to a "mere fallible contingent human."³

Amongst the chief characteristics of post-modernism are

- 1 Truth does not respond to reality⁴
- 2 There is no grand story, such as the Biblical account of salvation history that can account for the way things are in reality.⁵
- 3 We never epistemologically encounter reality in itself.⁶
- 4 There is no one foundation upon which all knowledge and reality is based.⁷
- 5 Because of certain inner inbuilt bias we are unable to encounter reality objectively.⁸
- 6 There is no absolute truth. Truth is a matter of perspective.⁹

Postmodernism is an extreme form of relativism. Therefore the exclusive claims of Christ are objectionable to a postmodernist.

¹ McDowell page 613.

² *Growing Your Church Through Evangelism and Outreach.*, 1st ed., Library of Christian leadership, Page 53 (Nashville. Tenn.: Moorings, 1996).

³ Ben Patterson, vol. 7, *Deepening Your Conversation With God*, The pastor's soul series ;;Library of leadership development, Page 140 (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House Publishers, 1999). Page 139

⁴ McDowell page page 613

⁵ McDowell page 614

⁶ McDowell page 616

⁷ McDowell page 616

⁸ McDowell page 617

⁹ McDowell page 618

“Postmodernism is dangerous not only because of what it has done to the secular person, but also because it destroys our apologetic, our methods for determining truth. What’s happening in the West with the emergence of postmodernism is only what has been in much of Asia for centuries but under different banners. For many years, the Indian would say, “All roads lead to God because truth is never absolute.” (That assumption was not in keeping with classical Hinduism, but became popular.)

So too with the way postmodernism works. The point of engagement must come through the common ground that even the postmodernist assumes in disbelieving something”¹⁰

Before moving on, it may be helpful to contrast postmodernism with the enlightenment. The enlightenment emphasized that truth could be discovered through scientific discovery. The ultimate goal was for each individual to live an autonomist self-contained life. Ultimately the human race would prosper and progress. Postmodernism is very different in outlook. Truth cannot be discovered, since there is no ultimate truth the key question is no longer “what is truth” but “of the options open to me which option do I prefer”. The enlightenments optimistic view of man’s progress is replaced with a fatalistic view that man is destined for human misery.¹¹

Answers to postmodernism.

- 1 If postmodernism is true, then its main point that there is no objective truth is shown to be a fallacy. Postmodernism then becomes a self-defeating argument.¹²
- 2 It is in fact possible to know reality.¹³
- 3 Postmodernists are unable to verify that truth does not correspond to reality. Science is turned into the study of ideas rather than of things¹⁴
- 4 Everyday life demonstrates that truth can be objectively known.¹⁵

Christians should seek practical opportunities to reach the postmodernist generation. Strategies can include

¹⁰*Growing Your Church Through Evangelism and Outreach.*, 1st ed., Library of Christian leadership, Page 20 (Nashville. Tenn.: Moorings, 1996).

¹¹ Jimmy Long, *Small Group Leaders' Handbook : The Next Generation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997, c1995). Chapter One

¹² McDowell page 619-622 for discussion.

¹³ McDowell page 622

¹⁴ McDowell page 223

¹⁵ McDowell page 626

- 1 When people experience a painful or traumatic experience be there for them.

“How is a postmodern, postindustrial and post-Christendom world to be able to embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ unless they can see the visible body of Christ in action, unless they can see Jesus wherever two or more Christians come together in face-to-face community? How can they embrace the full community life of God in Christ unless they can see, taste, touch, hear, feel and experience the loving and reconciling presence of Christ with Abba God in the midst of conflict, dissonance and alienation? There must be a personal connection between word and deed, proclamation and presence, orthodoxy and orthopraxy”¹⁶
- 2 Preach in a manner that will engage your audience by challenging them to live on a higher level and simulate them to think intelligently. Since postmodernists find being to directive offensive, try to persuade rather than direct.
- 3 We live in a society that appears to be increasingly fragmented therefore one of the key tasks in preaching is to help people connect one area of life with another. This requires much study and becoming acquainted with as many strands of life as possible with a view to making the Gospel relevant and meaningful to each of them.
- 4 We must be faithful to our own calling.¹⁷

¹⁶Gareth Weldon Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry : An Integrative Approach* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

¹⁷ *Growing Your Church Through Evangelism and Outreach.*, 1st ed., Library of Christian leadership, Page 53 (Nashville. Tenn.: Moorings, 1996).