

## POSTMODERNISM: WITHOUT LAW, “WITHOUT HOPE, AND WITHOUT GOD IN THE WORLD”<sup>1</sup>

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### ***Ideas Do Have Consequences***

When a syphilis-plagued philosopher insisted that “God is dead” and that humanity need not be constrained by traditional morals, his contemporaries<sup>2</sup> thought him a madman.

Within 40 years of Nietzsche’s death, however, Europe was burning. Hitler, in pursuit of Nietzsche’s “super race,” stood unopposed in purging Jews and gypsies from his new reich.

Six and a half decades after Nietzsche’s death. *Time Magazine* emblazoned its cover with three shocking words: “God Is Dead.” Bible reading and prayer were thrown out of state schools and sex education and a spirit of free love were ushered in.

Before a century had passed, the logical end of this philosophy had taken hold of a whole generation: not only was God dead, but so was truth. The absolutes on which morality had been based were dead. Determination of right and wrong became a relative matter.

Nietzsche may not be the direct cause of the confusion and emptiness of postmodernism, but he at least was the cultural prophet who heralded its coming. The age of enlightenment ushered in cultural modernism. It gradually displaced God’s authority with man’s reason. In its pursuit of the discovery of the secrets of the universe, academia believed that it could solve all the problems of humanity. With each scientific and technological advance from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries, God became less and less relevant.

While rationalism marginalized God, it did not solve the endemic problems of human suffering and inhumanity. The twentieth century has been the bloodiest century in world history. Nietzsche himself predicted this bloodbath as modern man would come of age, jettisoning medieval social mores for a morality of his own creation. Man would become free to play God.

Ironically, the age of reason that promised to give solutions for the woes of civilization has given birth to an era of willful ignorance and indifference. Modernism’s technological and philosophical<sup>3</sup> contributions to the barbarity of this century, not to mention its lack of answers for personal and world peace, have resulted in a reactionary movement against rationalism. The children of modernism are tired of waiting for the riddle of life to be answered. Postmoderns have come to believe that mankind cannot find absolute truth and have given up the search for it.

## **Kidnapping a Generation**

The baby-boomers saw the beginning of post-modernism. Traditional institutions were challenged; inhibitions were thrown to the wind. Their children, called “Generation X,” have imbibed their parents’ skepticism, not just for civilization’s standards, but even for truth and morals based on absolutes.

Allan Bloom has written a telling critique of American culture in his seminal work. *The Closing of the American Mind*. By 1986, Professor Bloom realized that the current crop of college students were looking at the world differently than his own generation. He lays much of the blame at the feet of social engineers like educational philosopher, John Stuart Mill. Listen to Prof. Bloom’s summary of Generation X’s worldview:

There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative.... The relativity of truth is not a theoretical insight but a moral postulate, the condition of a free society, or so they see it.... The danger they have been taught to fear from absolutism is not error but intolerance. Relativism is necessary to openness: and this is the virtue, the only virtue, which all primary education for more than fifty years has dedicated itself to inculcating. The point is not to correct the mistakes [of the past] and really be right; rather it is not to think you are right at all.<sup>4</sup>

Honesty, integrity, and truth are no longer the highest virtues. It becomes apparent why *tolerance* now is considered society’s *summum bonum*. The next person’s truth and sense of justice is thought just as relevant as yours. Consequentially, *acceptance* is only one step away from tolerance, even acceptance of objectionable behaviors and beliefs.

Sadly, the evangelical church has been conditioned by its generation. In a recent poll, George Barna found that 88% of evangelicals say that the Bible is the infallible, inerrant Word of God. The same poll reveals that 52% of evangelicals believe there is no absolute truth! It makes one think that evangelicals are not reading the Bible, that they don’t know how absolute are the Ten Commandments, or that they do not really know the unchanging God of the Bible.

## **God’s Unchanging Word**

As cultures ebb and flow, as megatrends come and go. God’s living Word always has remained the same. God has designed His Word to speak to every soul, to every society. His Word reveals rock-solid absolutes, yet is more than a catalog of “do’s and don’ts.”

God’s revelation of Himself (and of ourselves) is a self-consistent, life-giving system of living according to reality within the design of His creation.

Consider these attributes of God’s special revelation:

- *It; is unchanging*—“The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous

judgments endures forever” (Ps. 119:160).

- *It reveals the mind of the immutable God*—“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16; cf. John 17:17).
- *It is relevant to every age*—“This will be written for the generation to come, that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord” (Ps. 102:18, cf. v. 15).
- *It is clear and reasonable*—“The entrance of Thy Word gives light; it gives understanding to the simple” (Ps. 119:130).

God has revealed Himself so that human souls may “may have life, and have it more abundantly.” This life and the meaning of life is found only in one’s relation to his Creator and Redeemer as revealed in Christ and the Bible.

The Bible talks about a generation that is “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7). The rational, skeptical age of modernism scoffed at the simplicity of the Bible; the subjective, gullible age of postmodernism yawns over the claims of the Bible. Modernism claimed there is truth beyond and against the Bible; postmodernism makes no claims except that there is no truth.

### ***Post-modern Obfuscation***

Post-modernism has no universal truth. Values are not drawn from principles; they shift with each value judgment. Reality itself is as sure as quicksand.

When truth falls, bridges of understanding become natural casualties. Against the clear expression of truth, post-modernism is fatuous for muddying language. Words, ultimate vehicles of a common reality, are conveniently drained of any objective meaning by the children of this generation. This is why in the political arena our first post-modern president equivocates on the meaning of “is” and of “sexual relations.”

In the theological world, masters of double speak have subtlety turned the meaning of “infallible” from “infallible” to “reliable.” We used to speak of an infallible Bible, infallible because it has no fallacies or faults. In the last generation neo-evangelicals have poured a new meaning into the word “infallible”; they claimed the Bible was “reliable” or “infallible” for doctrine and faith, while it was not without alleged “errors of history and science.” Hence, orthodox Christianity has had to tighten up its description of the Bible by using the word “inerrant.”

G. E. Veith tersely summarizes the “semantic juggling” of post-modern language theory:

According to postmodernists, words do not have a defined objective meaning. Rather, meaning is only a matter of interpretation. People interpret words in different ways; therefore, words are incapable of communicating any kind of objective truth, as such. In practice, this “deconstruction” of language means that such texts as the Constitution and the Bible do not have fixed meanings, but are open to interpretation.

He concludes that, "If language has no meaning, there can be no perjury. And, we might continue, if there is no right and wrong, there can be no moral failure. [And] . . . if there is no truth, it is impossible to lie."<sup>5</sup> Principle has been sacrificed for personal convenience. Sadly, personal convenience divorced from reality gives way to personal nihilism and social confusion.

Post-modernism is the necessary product of a generation whose mind is darkened, of a people who are "ever learning, but not able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 3:7).

### ***Inescapable Reality***

Harsh realities are unavoidable. We may delude ourselves and even others through "compartmentalization" or by "constructing" our own interpretation of reality, but it takes no more than a child in the crowd to shout, "The emperor has no clothes!" An old-fashioned Christian Scientist may deny that he has a terminal disease, but his denial will not assuage the grief of his survivors nor avoid the cost of a funeral.

Death has a way of making everyone a philosopher. Death makes us ask philosophical questions like, "Why am I here? Is there life after death? Where will I go after death?"

It does not make sense for a mother to drown her toddlers and for high school students to kill their classmates. But postmodernism makes less sense when in theory it begs the question of "Why even prosecute such offenders?" After all, post-modernism has no absolute right or wrong.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Answers in God's Law***

In the face of this recipe for anarchy, our western legal system thankfully is rooted in the Judeo-Christian understanding of law. Despite America's multiplication of laws and its lawsuit-happy reputation, our system of jurisprudence is a key institution that preserves an objective view of reality.

As long as there is equal justice before the law, laws and breaches of the law will have to be easily definable to conclude a hearing. Facts and evidence in any case will have to be universally understandable. Words will have to follow their common, recognizable meanings.

While the legal system is an anchor that holds the rest of society in proximity to reality, a personal application of God's law to oneself brings an individual in touch with metaphysical and spiritual realities.

The Scripture says that "the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous, and good."<sup>7</sup> God's unchanging and absolute law shows mankind his miserable failings and rebellion: he can never find life nor please God on his own terms. This reality in the law of God drives the soul to repentance, so that he turns from his ways to God's provision in Christ. Hence God can say, "the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. . . ." For the confused post-modernist,

God says "... the statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple."<sup>8</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The wisest of sages taught us that there is nothing new under the sun. Not even post-modernism is brand new.

King Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes that he experimented with a modernistic worldview. He searched out every category of knowledge so that nothing was hidden from his view. He concluded that knowledge and experience cannot satisfy nor save a soul.

Thereupon he flirted for a time with a post-modern philosophy. When he realized as post-modernists do about modernism that the wise man shares the same fate as the fool, he "hated life," just like a nihilistic post-modern. He calls the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake "a chasing after the wind."<sup>9</sup>

Solomon knew from first-hand experience the vanity of modernism and postmodernism. He returns to sanity found in God's revelation when he declares,

A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without Him, who can eat or find enjoyment? To the man who pleases Him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness....<sup>10</sup>

His happy resolution to a life of frustration and experimentation is found in the conclusion of Ecclesiastes:

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.<sup>11</sup>

The message for our post-modern age is that there are real categories that we know as "good and evil." There are realities of right or wrong. Death is an inescapable reality. There is a coming judgment.

The most wonderful message is that God's unchanging Word gives meaning to life. Only it can, because while the earth is passing away and the lust thereof, only "the Word of the Lord endures forever."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 2:12c.

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche died in 1900.

<sup>3</sup> Marxism has killed more people by far than Nazism.

<sup>4</sup> Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1988), 25, 26.

<sup>5</sup> Gene Edward Veith in *World Magazine* (October 3, 1998) 25.

<sup>6</sup> Similarly, recent college professors have been shocked over students' views of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Jewish holocaust. Whereas professors formerly had to convince students of the fact of the holocaust, now they must disabuse students of the notions that the holocaust does not matter or that the Nazis may not have been wrong.

<sup>7</sup> Romans 7:12ff.

<sup>8</sup> Psalm 19:7.

<sup>9</sup> Ecclesiastes 2:17.

<sup>10</sup> Ecclesiastes 2:24-26a.

<sup>11</sup> Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14.

<sup>12</sup> 1 Peter 1:24, 25; 1 John 2:17.