

Modernism and Postmodernism

**Their History, Beliefs, Cultural Influence—
and How to Refute Them**

Robert E. Fugate, Ph.D.

Copyright © 2015 Thy Word Is Truth, LLC

P.O. Box 641592, Omaha, NE 68164

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Published by Lord of the Nations, LLC, Omaha, NE

Orders: LordoftheNations.com

Printed in the United States of America

Modernism and Postmodernism

Their History, Beliefs, Cultural Influence—
and How to Refute Them

Robert E. Fugate, Ph.D.

Lord of the Nations, LLC
Omaha, NE
LordoftheNations.com

Table of Contents

MODERNISM	1
Historical roots	1
The Enlightenment.....	2
Subsequent history	6
The logical progression in Enlightenment heresy.....	8
Enlightenment thought repudiated Christian doctrines	9
Impact on culture and church.....	10
Refutation	11
POSTMODERNISM.....	14
Definition	14
Historical roots.....	15
Key tenets of postmodernism.....	15
Comparison of Biblical theism, modernism, postmodernism ..	20
Impact of postmodernism on Western culture	27
Impact of postmodernism within Western Christian church ...	33
Theological summary of postmodernism	39
Refuting postmodernism	39
Postmodernist ethics are self-refuting	44
Biblical theology of language	46
Miscellaneous	52
The cost and the power of holding to the truth	52
Bibliography	53

Modernism and Postmodernism

MODERNISM

Definition: The term “modernism” generally denotes a school of thought, in Europe and America, extending from the 17th century through the mid-20th century.¹

Historical roots

The Renaissance (literally new birth or revival) was a fifteenth–sixteenth-century revival of classical influence in Europe. It elevated mankind to the center of reality. Characteristic of the new outlook was Francis Bacon’s (1561–1626) scientific method, which was used to conquer nature. Bacon’s famous dictum is “knowledge is power.”² A point less recognized, “Faith in salvation by the state was basic to the Renaissance.”³

Building on the Renaissance, the Enlightenment elevated the individual self to the center of the world, thereby dethroning God and His revelation.⁴ René Descartes (1596–1650) laid the philosophical foundation for the modern world with his focus on doubt and his first principle, “I think, therefore, I am.” Isaac

¹ As an ecclesiastical designation of a theological position, the term “modernist” has its origin in Pius X’s papal encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (“On the Doctrine of the Modernists,” 1907) (*A Handbook of Christian Theology*, ed. Marvin Halverson [Cleveland, OH: World Publishing Co., 1958], 234). Cf. Pius X’s *Lamentabili Sane* (“Syllabus Condemning the Errors of the Modernists,” 1907) and “The Oath Against Modernism” (1910); available at <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/category/pius10>.

² Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 59.

³ Rousas J. Rushdoony, *The Roots of Reconstruction* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1991), 895.

⁴ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 2, 60–62, 79. “The centrality of the autonomous self...became the chief identifying characteristic of the emerging modern era” (79).

Newton (1642–1727) laid the scientific foundation for modernity with his model of the physical world being a machine governed by mathematical laws, which can be discovered by the human mind.⁵ Key eighteenth-century modernist philosophers were David Hume (1711–1776) and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). The roots of modernity are primarily found in the Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment

The Enlightenment was an 18th-century intellectual/philosophical and cultural movement in Europe. It is often misleadingly called “the Age of Reason”⁶ or the Age of Enlightenment—in contrast to the supposed darkness of the Middle Ages (which had been a synthesis of Christian and Greek thought). Enlightenment thinkers attempted to emancipate humanity from superstition and received religious doctrine, and to establish civilization on rational inquiry, empirical evidence, and scientific discovery.

Those Enlightenment thinkers who were nominally Christian rejected Biblical theism for deism. But deism quickly devolved into naturalism.⁷

“Virtually every European country, and every sphere of life and thought, was [*sic*] affected by it [Enlightenment thought].”⁸

⁵ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 2f, 63–67. Cf. *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Simon Blackburn (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1994), 120.

⁶ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1994), 78f. McGrath objects that “the Middle Ages was just as much an ‘Age of Reason’ as the Enlightenment; the crucial difference lay in the manner in which reason was used, and the limits which were understood to be imposed upon it. Nor was the eighteenth century consistently rational in every respect.”

⁷ Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 35.

⁸ *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. Ted Honderich (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995), 236.

Key tenets of Enlightenment thought

- Man's autonomous, objective **reason** is the omni-competent judge between competing truth claims, and it is the ultimate authority over all aspects of human life. Reason enables man to gain understanding of the whole, objective, rational universe, which is governed by natural laws.⁹ "The modern ideal champions the autonomous self, the self-determining subject who exists outside any tradition or community."¹⁰ This autonomous, reasoning individual lives by Kant's dictum: "Have courage to use your own reason/understanding" (think for yourself).¹¹ Reason systematizes the data derived from the empirical tools of observation and experimentation. Go wherever the facts and logic take you. Rejecting the Biblical truth that man's mind is marred by sin, John Locke (1632–1704) taught that the human mind begins as a blank slate. Thus Enlightenment thought "exercises an absolute faith in human rational capabilities."¹²
- Philosophical commitments: **empiricism** (truth is discovered through the senses), **naturalism** (no supernatural), and **materialism** (all is matter). Knowledge is gained primarily by use of the scientific method.¹³
- Belief in the **innate goodness of man and nature**.

⁹ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 68.

¹⁰ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 4.

¹¹ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 69. *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, eds. Erwin Fahlbusch, et al., 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999–2008), 4:296. Colin Brown, "Enlightenment, The," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*₁ (EDT₁), ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 355 = EDT₂ (2001), 377.

¹² Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 4.

¹³ Millard J. Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation: Perspectives on Hermeneutical Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993), 105.

- Emphasis on nature and what is “**natural**”; what is natural” is what is right (especially in the French Romantic philosopher, Jean Jacques Rousseau [1712–1778]).
- **Rejection of** external and traditional **authorities** that told man what to think and do, such as the Bible, creeds, the church, and the state. Enlightened scholars taught that no generation should be bound by the creeds and customs of bygone ages.
- Optimistic view of inevitable **scientific and social progress** through history.
- Enlightened **education** prescribed that a child be allowed to follow his own inclinations rather than be coerced into learning or adopting patterns of behavior. The teacher merely facilitated the child’s free inquiry. Thus the Enlightenment laid the foundations for much modern educational theorizing.¹⁴
- Humanistic “**natural rights**” theories and **social contract** theories of the state (Thomas Hobbes [1588–1679], John Locke [1632–1704], Jean Jacques Rousseau).¹⁵ In Enlightenment thought, civil governments derive their authority from the consent of the governed (i.e., social contract)—not from God (cp. modern Libertarians). Thus the state is not a divinely appointed institution based upon, and subordinate to, the Bible.
- **Utilitarian ethics**—the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people (Jeremy Bentham [1748–1832] and John Stuart Mill [1806–1873]).

¹⁴ EDT₁, 355f = EDT₂,378.

¹⁵ The American Declaration of Independence (1776) uses Enlightenment language: “We hold these truths to be self-evident [through nature], that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

The Enlightenment “was truly one of the most hopeful episodes in human history.”¹⁶

The Enlightenment thinkers tended to atheism or at least to a purely naturalistic or rationalistic deism, stripped of supernatural revelation and divine miracles.¹⁷ “Nature’s God” largely replaced the God of the Bible.¹⁸ Many enlightened thinkers were Freemasons.¹⁹

Modernist and postmodernist philosophers’ views of truth

Philosopher David Hume (1711–1776) demonstrated that empiricism leads to the dead end of skepticism.²⁰ This motivated Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) to create a bifurcated field of knowledge²¹:

Noumena: God, Faith, Moral Value, Subjective, Transcendental
Freedom, Will

Phenomena: Knowledge/Fact, Objective, Autonomous
Mind/Reason, Mechanical Determinism

¹⁶ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 71.

¹⁷ *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 236. EDT₁, 356 = EDT₂, 378f. Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 71–73.

¹⁸ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 73.

¹⁹ EDT₁, 356 = EDT₂, 379. Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 78.

²⁰ Hume argued that all we can know empirically is our perceptions; but these do not provide a sufficient foundation for many of our most commonplace concepts, such as causality (Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 75).

Philosophical skepticism is the denial that genuine human knowledge or even rational belief is possible; nothing can be known with certainty. However, skepticism is self-refuting, since we cannot know that nothing can be known.

²¹ Robert E. Fugate, *The Bible: God’s Words to You* (Omaha, NE: Thy Word Is Truth, 2012), 260–263, 319–321, 793–795ff.

The upper story noumena is subjective, unverifiable, suprahistorical, mystical, and cannot be penetrated by human reason. The lower story phenomena is the objective, impersonal, empirical, and verifiable realm of science and history. The noumenal realm is things-as-they-are-in-themselves. The phenomena realm is things-as-they-are-to-me (i.e., raw empirical data as it is interpreted by the fixed categories of my mind). Kant's two, absolutely-separated realms of knowledge created two different kinds of truth: truth-in-itself (in the noumenal world)—which man can never know—and truth-as-we-know-it (in the phenomenal world).²²

“Kant envisioned the thinking self in a sense ‘creating’ the world—that is, the world of its own knowledge. The focus of philosophical reflection ever since has been this world-creating self.”²³

Georg W.F. Hegel (1770–1831): Truth is the sum total of perspectives.²⁴

Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) (existentialist): “Subjectivity is truth.”

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900): Truth is a conflict of interpretations.²⁵

Subsequent history

The French Revolution (1789–1799) was a test case to apply the Enlightenment ideals (freedom, dignity, tolerance, autonomy, progress, justice, reason, and virtue) in setting up a constitutional

²² EDT₂, 940.

²³ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 79.

²⁴ EDT₂, 941.

²⁵ *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. Erwin Fahlbusch, *et al.*, 4:299. Elsewhere, Nietzsche wrote, “Truths are illusions” (cited by Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity against the Challenges of Postmodernism*, 29).

state.²⁶ Indeed, the motto of the French Revolution was “liberty, equality, fraternity.” (Cp. Marx’s maxim: “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need.”)

Enlightenment thought (spurred on by Illuminati-infiltrated Freemasonry) produced the French Revolution (1789–1799), which was characterized by anarchy, widespread bloodshed in Robespierre’s “Reign of Terror,” flagrant immorality and perversions, and hatred of Christianity.

Georg W.F. Hegel saw reason as the new god, who was incarnate in elite men, who rule the state. Thus the state is god walking on earth.²⁷ Hegel constantly related enlightenment to revolution (“fury of dissolution”).²⁸

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) was last of the Enlightenment thinkers. Kant effectively destroyed the philosophical basis for the Enlightenment with his Copernican revolution in philosophy. Kant and David Hume (1711–1776) shook the confidence in man’s rational capacities. The French Revolution (1789–1799) and the Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815) shook the Enlightenment’s confidence in man’s innate goodness and rationality.²⁹ “Marxism displaced confidence in evolutionary progress by revolutionary eschatology.”³⁰

“One of the consequences of the Enlightenment was the legal and social down-grading of women” (although Rousseau’s Romanticism did foster feminism). The Enlightenment idea of liberty was primarily freedom from God and His law-word and

²⁶ *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. Erwin Fahlbusch, *et al.*, 2:96.

²⁷ Rousas J. Rushdoony, *The Roots of Reconstruction*, 489.

²⁸ *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. Erwin Fahlbusch, *et al.*, 2:96f.

²⁹ EDT₁, 356 = EDT₂, 379.

³⁰ Carl F.H. Henry, “Postmodernism: The New Spectre?” in *Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1995), 37.

freedom from all God-ordained responsibilities, especially family.³¹

Subsequently, German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) severely criticized inconsistent “Enlightenment philosophers who removed God from the belief systems yet retained belief in Christian moral principles and an orderly, rational universe.”³²

In the twentieth century, “It is modernism, especially with its compulsive desire to break totally with the past, which gave rise to the Nazi holocaust and the Stalinist purges.”³³ Philosophical literary deconstruction (discussed below) put the final nail in the coffin of modernism.³⁴

“By the end of the 1990s everyone in the Western world and much of the East came to see that confidence in human reason is almost dead.”³⁵

The logical progression in Enlightenment heresy³⁶

1. Since the beliefs of Christianity are rational, they should be capable of standing up to critical examination. (This still allows for divine revelation.) [This argument is deceptive because “critical examination” imports anti-Christian presuppositions.]

³¹ Rousas J. Rushdoony, *The Roots of Reconstruction*, 966f, 970.

³² Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity against the Challenges of Postmodernism*, 37.

³³ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 103 = Alister E. McGrath, *Intellectuals Don't Need God and Other Myths* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 175.

³⁴ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 5.

³⁵ James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 219.

³⁶ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 81f (essentially the same article is in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, 150–156.

2. Since the beliefs of Christianity are rational, they can be derived from reason itself (i.e., apart from divine revelation). [This denies the noetic effects of the fall.³⁷]
3. Reason is competent to judge revelation. (This enthronement of autonomous human reason above divine revelation was symbolized in the enthronement of the Goddess of Reason in Notre Dame de Paris in 1793.)

Enlightenment thought repudiated Christian doctrines³⁸

1. Miracles (considered to be violations of nature) are impossible in a mechanized universe that is governed by Newtonian physics.
2. Divine revelation is impossible.
3. Man has no original sin.
4. The problem of evil disproves Christianity (God cannot be both good and omnipotent³⁹).
5. The Bible is an ordinary book, subject to textual criticism and higher criticism, like any other book (not a divinely-inspired, infallible book of unchallengeable truth).⁴⁰
6. The identity and person of Jesus:

³⁷ “The noetic effects of sin are so severe that we culpably distort the data brought to us by our senses to make it fit into self-serving grids” (Carl F.H. Henry, “Postmodernism: The New Spectre?” in *Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery, 46).

³⁸ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 83–86.

³⁹ Gordon H. Clark, “Enlightenment, The,” *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. Philip E. Hughes, vol. 4 (Marshallton, DE: The National Foundation of Christian Education, 1972), 4:72.

⁴⁰ “Biblical criticism developed in Germany had skepticism built into it from the start in the form of Kant’s denial that God communicates verbally with men (a denial which strikes at the Bible’s main claim and message), plus the eighteenth-century rationalist assumption that miracles do not happen. Naturally, the skepticism present in its premises comes out in its conclusions” (James I. Packer, *Freedom and Authority* [Oakland, CA: International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 1981], 29).

- Jesus was an enlightened moral teacher—not the unique Son of God; this began the quest to discover the real historical Jesus (who contrasts with the New Testament/church’s mythological Jesus Christ);
- The moral example theory of the atonement: Jesus’ moral example of self-giving and dedication was intended to inspire similar self-giving and dedication in his followers— His death did not provide substitutionary atonement for sinners.

In essence, modernity transferred to itself the attributes of God; then it emptied the present life of all but utilitarian value. “It proclaimed the death of the God of the Bible. The loss of God carried with it the loss also of the inherited view of truth, of the self, of meaning and worth, and of history.”⁴¹

Impact on culture and church

- Secular humanism (man is the measure of all things, the intellectual center of the universe) pervaded all of culture (in opposition to the centrality of God and His sovereignty or free and absolute will).
- Evolutionary science and psychology undermined Christianity.
- Liberalism rejected special revelation (including the divinely-inspired, infallible Bible) and miracles.
- Higher criticism assaulted the Bible ⁴² (robbing it of truthfulness, authority, and the genuineness of the Biblical text and the Biblical canon).
- Ironically, man was dehumanized, being a mere cog in an impersonal, machine-like universe.⁴³

⁴¹ Carl F.H. Henry, “Postmodernism: The New Spectre?” in *Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery, 37.

⁴² Robert E. Fugate, *The Bible: God’s Words to You*, 258–271, 418–429 (OT canon), 618ff (textual criticism).

- Influenced orthodox theologians (such as B.B. Warfield) against post-Biblical miracles and made them favorably disposed toward humanistic textual criticism and evolutionary science.

Refutation

1. The history of philosophy conclusively demonstrates that empiricism and rationalism are failed attempts to provide a coherent epistemology.⁴⁴ They cannot justify any knowledge whatsoever.
2. Humanistic science (based on empiricism and inductive reasoning) cannot discover absolute truth.⁴⁵
3. Christianity opposes human autonomy on the grounds of creation, fall and redemption. The doctrine of creation opposes human autonomy since man is God's finite creature (Ac 17:28). The doctrine of the fall opposes human autonomy since man's resultant depravity renders man totally dependent on God for truth, wisdom, guidance, direction, salvation, etc. The doctrine of redemption opposes human autonomy since only God can save man and since those people whom Christ redeemed belong to God, not to themselves (1 Cor 6:19–20).
4. Man's mind and will are depraved.⁴⁶
5. Because of man's sin God cursed the entire created order, and it is presently abnormal (Gn 3:14, 17–19; Ro 8:20–22; Job 25:5). What exists in nature (e.g.: thorns, thistles, cruelty,

⁴³ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 63.

⁴⁴ Robert E. Fugate, *The Bible: God's Words to You*, 28–35. See especially Greg L. Bahnsen's lectures, "History of Western Philosophy."

⁴⁵ Robert E. Fugate, *The Bible: God's Words to You*, 74–86.

⁴⁶ See Robert E. Fugate, "Natural State of Fallen Man."

death, and decay; man's corrupt nature and behavior; etc.) is not what is "normal" or "right."

6. Utilitarian ethics (the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people) is illogical and impossible to apply:

- It is based on the naturalistic fallacy: the fact that people do seek pleasure in all their choices does not prove that they ought to do so.
- How can you measure or quantify peoples' happiness or pleasure?
- How do you compare the happiness of some with the unhappiness of another/others? [Examples: university hazing; gang rape and torture by a band of Muslim Boko Haram or ISIS terrorists.] Such supposed comparisons cannot be proven or calculated. Thus utilitarianism makes it impossible to make moral judgments.
- Any consequential/instrumental theory of goodness (good is what produces a particular end) always begs the question as to what is intrinsically good and how one can know it.
- Requires omniscience. One would have to be able to trace the consequences of an action into the indefinite future throughout the whole universe—and into eternity—to know whether the action was truly good!⁴⁷

In sum, modernism sought to liberate man from a God-created, God-ordered, God-ruled universe. "Modernist theology freed time of eternal boundaries and constraints and meshed it with evolutionary advance that devalued the past. It

⁴⁷ Greg L. Bahnsen, "Practical Apologetics." See John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 96–99.

maximized individual liberty by loosing it from transcendent authority. It ignored the bearing of sin and sanctification upon the social order and assumed that history and society are moving toward a utopian climax.”⁴⁸

However, Enlightenment thought provided a totally inadequate basis for epistemology and ethics. It also failed morally, producing a terrible record in defending human “rights” and liberty. “The modern age saw the worst development of serfdom since the fall of Rome.”⁴⁹

The collapse of modernism and the contemporary flux of postmodern ideas manifest the decline of secular humanism.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Carl F.H. Henry, “Postmodernism: The New Spectre?” in *Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery, 36f.

⁴⁹ Rousas J. Rushdoony, *The Roots of Reconstruction*, 968.

⁵⁰ Carl F.H. Henry, “Postmodernism: The New Spectre?” in *Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery, 50.

POSTMODERNISM

Definition

Defining postmodernism is like defining the indefinite.⁵¹ The term “postmodern” has “often popularly applied to virtually anything that overturns traditional standards and is thus perceived to promote relativism (moral or otherwise).”⁵² “Postmodernism is not a single school of thought with fixed teachings, but a rapidly evolving group of [intellectual] concepts”⁵³ having diverse cultural expressions. Here are two attempts at descriptively defining postmodernism:

“Postmodernism is a vague and ill-defined notion, which perhaps could be described as the general intellectual outlook arising after the collapse of modernism. ... To give a full definition of postmodernism is virtually impossible; nevertheless, it is possible to identify its leading general features.”⁵⁴

“Postmodernism can be defined as a set of discourses, developed within multinational capitalist economies, that share a denial of the possibility of universal or rational principles, fixed meanings or objective understandings of truth and transhistorical metanarratives such as history and progress. Postmodernism is wary of every truth claim, preferring truths, understood to be both partial and plural, in place of any notion of a single, univocal truth.”⁵⁵

⁵¹ James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 212.

⁵² EDT₂, 939.

⁵³ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1996), 29; cf. 86. “Postmodernists rebel against categories and labels” (18).

⁵⁴ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 102f = Alister E. McGrath, *Intellectuals Don't Need God and Other Myths*, 175.

⁵⁵ *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. Erwin Fahlbusch, et al., 4:300.

Historical roots

German philosophers Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) and Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) (a Nazi) may have been the first postmodern thinkers. Neo-orthodox Karl Barth (1886–1968)⁵⁶ and liberal Paul Tillich (1886–1965) were theological precursors to postmodernism. Many postmoderns also look to Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) for their historical and psychological analyses of culture.⁵⁷ Tellingly, the acknowledgement of the death of God is the beginning of postmodernism.⁵⁸ In America, postmodernism began in the early 1960s. Its heyday was the late 1980s and 1990s.⁵⁹

Key tenets of postmodernism

1. A **precommitment to relativism and pluralism with regard to truth**. Postmodernism dogmatically rejects the idea of truth being objective, universal, and immutable—as existing apart from human thought processes, whether anyone believes it or not. “There is no absolute truth; rather, truth is relative to the community in which we participate.”⁶⁰
2. **Methodology**. Postmodernism does not start with metaphysics or epistemology, but how language functions to construct meaning.
3. **Linguistics**. **Structural linguistics** theory precludes any fixed, absolute meaning of language. All we ever know is words, which refer only to other words, not to objects to which the

⁵⁶ For example, Barth’s grounding of the faith within the community of the church (*Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. Erwin Fahlbusch, et al., 4:301).

⁵⁷ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 206, 129–131.

⁵⁸ James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 211f. *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. John Bowden (NY, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 956f.

⁵⁹ *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. Erwin Fahlbusch, et al., 4:303.

⁶⁰ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 8; cf. 14f. This contrasts with the highly individualistic relativism of late modernity.

words refer (i.e., the non-referential nature of language). “I can never climb out from under all human languages simultaneously, in order to inspect in an unprejudiced manner the relation between the world as it really is and the world as I receive it within my encasement within English.”⁶¹ There is an inherent indeterminacy to language itself. There are only interpretations of interpretations. Language cannot render objective truths about the “real” (extralinguistic, beyond language) world. Rather, language is a cultural creation, a social convention that shapes the way every culture thinks.⁶² This means that **texts and statements have no objective meaning**; they mean only what their readers interpret them to mean.⁶³ There are as many meanings of a text as there are readers. **Logic** is created by the syntax of whatever language a community is using. The logic/syntax of one language cannot be applied to the logic/syntax of another language; every language has a logic of its own.⁶⁴ Thus there are no immaterial, invariant, universal, absolute laws of logic (or mathematics). It turns out that language is whimsical and capricious⁶⁵—as are the institutions that exploit it.⁶⁶

- Deconstruction. Atheistic French philosopher and founder of literary deconstruction, Jacques Derrida

⁶¹ Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 312.

⁶² Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 51.

⁶³ James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 214, 221–223.

⁶⁴ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 39f.

⁶⁵ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 103 = Alister E. McGrath, *Intellectuals Don't Need God and Other Myths*, 176.

⁶⁶ *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, ed. Alister E. McGrath (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1993), 457.

[pronounced zhock dare ē dah] (1930–2004) taught that the mediation of knowledge by language makes knowing things “just as they are” impossible. You cannot get outside your own thoughts (which involve language) to investigate anything as it is in itself. The term **deconstruction** denotes “the critical method which virtually declares that the identity and intentions of the author of a text are irrelevant to the interpretation of the text, prior to asserting that, in any case, no meaning can be found in it. All interpretations are equally valid, or equally meaningless.”⁶⁷ People have the right to exercise their own freedom and creativity of interpretation. The goal of deconstruction is to undo and deconstruct the privileged hierarchies of power who construct texts in order to oppress and exclude those who disagree with them. Thus deconstructing a text breaks its control or power over one’s thoughts and actions. “Postmodern philosophers applied the theories of the literary deconstructionists to the world as a whole.”⁶⁸

4. Pragmatic truths/stories. Since the truth about reality itself is forever hidden from us, all we can do is tell stories (useful fictions). All stories are equally valid. There are pragmatic truths that are useful (dynamic theory of truth; epistemic pragmatism), but there is no known or knowable connection between what we think and say with what is actually in the

⁶⁷ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 103 = Alister E. McGrath, *Intellectuals Don’t Need God and Other Myths*, 176.

⁶⁸ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer of Postmodernism*, 6.

world⁶⁹ (contra realism). There are only multiple realities and a multitude of differing perspectives. “All is difference.”⁷⁰

5. Stories give communities their cohesive character.⁷¹
6. All narratives mask a **play for power**. Any one narrative used as a **metanarrative** (i.e.: an overarching explanation of reality based on central organizing truths; universal truth claims; or worldview⁷²) is oppressive.⁷³ Thus the task of postmodernists is to use their hermeneutic of suspicion to unmask what is hiding.⁷⁴
7. There is no substantial self. Human beings make themselves who they are by the languages they construct about themselves.⁷⁵ “The self is constituted solely of changing relationships.”⁷⁶ “Because our lives are **culturally determined** and because our very thoughts are shaped by our language, this individuality is only an illusion. ... Individual identity is an illusion...[leading to] the **death of the self...anti-humanism.**”⁷⁷

⁶⁹ James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 219, 214, 222, 232.

⁷⁰ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer of Postmodernism*, 7.

⁷¹ James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 223. Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 44.

⁷² Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 201. James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 214.

⁷³ This idea of language primarily being used to exert power was particularly developed by French postmodernist Michel Foucault (1926–1984). In his view, “every interpretation of reality is an assertion of power” (Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer of Postmodernism*, 6; cf. James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 224). Did Foucault’s homosexual lifestyle influence him to conclude this?

⁷⁴ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 54.

⁷⁵ James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 225.

⁷⁶ Carl F.H. Henry, “Postmodernism: The New Spectre?” in *Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery, 38.

⁷⁷ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 76, 72f.

There is **no fundamental difference between man and animals and nature.**⁷⁸

8. **Ethical relativism.** Ethics, like knowledge, is a linguistic construct. Social good is whatever society takes it to be.⁷⁹ To be truthful simply means using one's customary community metaphors. There is a moral obligation to lie according to fixed convention, to lie herd-like in a style obligatory for all.⁸⁰ "If there is no truth, there can be no lies, or rather everything is a lie."⁸¹ Postmodernism's social construction of society justifies manufacturing evidence and programmatic lying.⁸²

Thus, "Postmodernist premises are destructive of any and every world-and-life view, however logically ordered."⁸³ Most of the leading French postmodernists are atheists.⁸⁴

In sum, postmodernism asserts the **death of God**, the **death of reason**, the **death of truth**, the **death of the self**, the **death of good and evil**, as well as the death of a real world, freedom, purposive agency, and historical meaning.⁸⁵ "Such concepts as moral responsibility and individual freedom are thus also illusions, shaped by our own Western bourgeois culture."⁸⁶ Thus

⁷⁸ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 74.

⁷⁹ James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 226.

⁸⁰ James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 220.

⁸¹ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 173.

⁸² Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 170.

⁸³ Carl F.H. Henry, "Postmodernism: The New Spectre?" in *Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery, 43f.

⁸⁴ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Thiselton Companion to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 687.

⁸⁵ James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 240. Carl F.H. Henry, "Postmodernism: The New Spectre?" in *Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery, 38f, 48f.

⁸⁶ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 76f.

postmodernists deconstruct the concepts of both individual human identity and universal humanity (i.e., mankind).⁸⁷

Comparison of Biblical theism, modernism, postmodernism

	BIBLICAL THEISM	MODERNISM	POSTMODERNISM
Philosophy	Creator-creature dualism	Atomism; naturalism; materialism; realism; ⁸⁸ mechanistic view of universe	Monism; ⁸⁹ irrationalism

⁸⁷ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 77.

⁸⁸ “The view that objects of knowledge truly exist apart from our knowledge of them, in contrast to idealism and phenomenalism” (Donald K. McKim, *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 2nd ed. [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2014], 262). Realism assumes “the objectivity of the world, and the epistemological prowess of human reason” (Stanley Grenz in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, eds. Millard J. Erickson, Paul K. Helseth, Justin Taylor [Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004], 169). “Operating on objectivist assumptions, the realist defines truth as the correspondence between our assertions and the objective world about which they are made” (Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 41).

⁸⁹ *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, ed. Adrian Hastings, et. al (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 552.

	BIBLICAL THEISM	MODERNISM	POSTMODERNISM
Epistemology	<p>Truth is divinely revealed, objective, absolute; it is independent of human desire; the functional view of truth is false.</p> <p>Humans can possess knowledge because God created them rational creatures.</p>	<p>Man’s autonomous, objective reason discovers truth; scientism.⁹⁰</p> <p>Empiricism and correspondence theory of truth.</p> <p>Knowledge is certain, objective, and good.⁹¹</p>	<p>No universal, immutable truth exists; truths are relative to one’s community⁹² and are pragmatic. Humankind creates truth as we construct languages that serve our purposes.</p> <p>Advocating any universal truth is a power play to be opposed.</p> <p>“Knowledge is replaced with interpretation.”⁹³</p> <p>Knowledge comes through socialization.</p>

⁹⁰ Scientism asserts that all truth must be scientifically proven, in other words, that scientific study defines the limits of knowledge (Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity against the Challenges of Postmodernism*, 40f).

⁹¹ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 4, 81.

⁹² Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 8, 14f. “The postmodern understanding of knowledge, therefore, is built on two foundational assumptions: (1) postmoderns view all explanations of reality as constructions that are useful but not objectively true, and (2) postmoderns deny that we have the ability to step outside our constructions of reality” (Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 43).

⁹³ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 40.

	BIBLICAL THEISM	MODERNISM	POSTMODERNISM
Cosmos	Ordered universe created out of nothing by the transcendent, personal God. Reality of both supernatural and natural, spirit and matter	The natural order (matter, energy, time) is eternal, self-existent, self-sufficient, ⁹⁴ uncreated, and impersonal; governed by chance	(New Age view) a divine, living, conscious organism. Multiverse, not universe
Religion	Biblical Christianity	Secular humanism	(Popular option) New Age mysticism (e.g., spiritualistic environmentalism, animal rights ⁹⁵); one-world religion

⁹⁴ Whenever man rejects the infinite-personal God of the Bible, man then attributes divine attributes to the natural order. For example, in the worldview of naturalism, eternity and self-existence are attributes of matter. Deterministic philosophies and psychologies attribute predestination to the natural order. In the new age pantheistic worldview, everything is god (REF). “Humanistic science, by positing as an article of faith the ultimacy of the universe, has as a result a strong tendency towards determinism and the denial of secondary causes as anything more than an illusion” (Rousas J. Rushdoony, *The Philosophy of the Christian Curriculum* [Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1981], 71f).

⁹⁵ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 74f.

	BIBLICAL THEISM	MODERNISM	POSTMODERNISM
Jesus Christ	The unique incarnation of God; the only Lord and Savior	An “inspired” human teacher	(New Age view) one of many enlightened gurus (master teachers) who have appeared throughout history
Ethics	Objective and absolute, based on the moral law of God, which is grounded in the nature of God	<p>Universal, rationally-determined moral values; later modernists are moral relativists.⁹⁶</p> <p>Based on universal human reason and experience and human ability to discern objective right from wrong.</p> <p>Human reason discovers natural moral law.⁹⁷</p>	<p>Relativistic, communally-determined ethics (e.g., pro-feminism, pro-homosexuality, pro-abortion).⁹⁸</p> <p>Created by the multiplicity of languages used to describe right from wrong</p>

⁹⁶ Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity against the Challenges of Postmodernism*, 38. Their relativism was highly individualistic (“to each his/her own”; “everyone has a right to his/her own opinion”) (Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 15).

	BIBLICAL THEISM	MODERNISM	POSTMODERNISM
Humans	Created by God in His image	Material machines; possess autonomous free-will; innately good. (Or, more deterministic) the product of their DNA template that is the result of evolution (chance mutations + survival of the fittest)	Cogs in a social machine; cultural determinism. ⁹⁹ An insubstantial self, constructed by the language it uses to describe itself
Basic human problem	Ethical/moral. Sinners in rebellion against God (causing separation from God)	Superstition and ignorance; environment	Absolutizing one's own perspective

⁹⁷ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 62.

⁹⁸ Alan Cairns "Postmodernism," *Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International, 2002), 334. "'Good' is internally relative to the community in question" (Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Thiselton Companion to Christian Theology*, 688).

⁹⁹ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 32–35.

	BIBLICAL THEISM	MODERNISM	POSTMODERNISM
The solution to the human problem	Salvation by faith in the finished work of Christ that transforms human nature	Scientific advancement and technology; education. The savior is humanism	Demote one's religious beliefs to the level of subjective preferences. The savior is postmodernism ¹⁰⁰
History	The outworking of the purposeful plan of the infinite, tri-personal Creator-God ¹⁰¹	Inevitable utopian social progress through science and education (knowledge is inherently good)	Ongoing process: (a) comprised of aimless, meaningless sequences; and (b) having no objective or goal. ¹⁰² Pessimistic.

¹⁰⁰ Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 314.

¹⁰¹ Robert E. Fugate, *The Bible: God's Words to You*, 64–69.

¹⁰² Carl F.H. Henry, "Postmodernism: The New Spectre?" in *Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery, 38, 48f.

	BIBLICAL THEISM	MODERNISM	POSTMODERNISM
Politics	Based on Bible—especially Biblical law and Biblically-defined jurisdictional authority for family, church, state	Nationalism	Internationalism/globalism; fosters both terrorist acts/ anarchy and totalitarianism
Economics	Based on Biblical law, Biblical ethics, and Biblically-defined jurisdictional authority for family, church, state	Secular, laissez-faire capitalism	Socialism (often fascism ¹⁰³); fosters group victimization and rage, entitlement mentality
Justice	Based on Biblical revelation from just God	Based on universal reason	No universal reason as the guide to justice. By definition, all societies are just because they create their own ethical standards ¹⁰⁴

“Postmodernity, in distinction to modernity, values irony above reason, paradox and sharp juxtaposition above light and logic, ambivalence above certainty, the hybrid above the purified, the

¹⁰³ “Fascism, like postmodernism, had its origins in romanticism, with its primitivism and subjectivity, and existentialism, with its rejection of absolutes and is ‘triumph of the will’” (Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 165).

¹⁰⁴ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 159.

fragment above the completed, surface rather than profundities, monism rather than dualism.”¹⁰⁵

However, “Postmodernism retains a number of [God-defying] elements that characterized modernism: the rejection of transcendent deity and of miracle and the disavowal of supernatural revelation and of absolute truth, fixed meaning, and purpose.”¹⁰⁶

Impact of postmodernism on Western culture

- Truth and rationality. There are no absolutes (“that may be true for you, but it is not true for me”). Your personal experience, subjectively interpreted, determines what is true for you.¹⁰⁷ People think unsystematically, holding mutually-contradictory ideas.¹⁰⁸ “Logical consistency is not seen as a virtue or inconsistency as a vice.”¹⁰⁹ In a postmodern culture truth is dead; there is no basis for knowledge of any kind.¹¹⁰ Truth may be viewed as a rhetorical device used by the strong to justify their power over the weak.
- Religion. All religion reflects a historically-conditioned bias. Since no objective truth exists, postmodernism fosters **religious pluralism**, which is manifested in the explosion of

¹⁰⁵ *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. John Bowden, 956. Others associate postmodernism with fragmentation, anarchy, indeterminacy, rhetoric, and irony—in contrast with modernism’s coherence, hierarchy, purpose, and reason (Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Thiselton Companion to Christian Theology*, 686).

¹⁰⁶ Carl F.H. Henry, “Postmodernism: The New Spectre?” in *Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery, 48.

¹⁰⁷ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 211.

¹⁰⁸ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 175f.

¹⁰⁹ Millard J. Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation: Perspectives on Hermeneutical Issues*, 104.

¹¹⁰ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 51.

irrational, monistic Eastern religions, goddess Gaia worship, and Twelve-Step programs (with their god as you understand he/she/it).¹¹¹ In new age thought the self is divine (Gn 3:5), the creator of its own reality.¹¹² Through meditation, hypnosis, “creative visualization,” and “centering,” we can become conscious of our “higher self,” our god within. Worship becomes self-love, rather than the worship of the triune God of the Bible.¹¹³ Through the power of creative visualization and imaging, one’s physical and emotional health and his/her financial well-being can be enhanced.¹¹⁴ Thus postmoderns are interested in spirituality, but reject Biblical Christianity. They are only opposed to religious teaching that holds to absolute, objective truth and the necessity and usefulness of reason/logic. Postmodern spirituality is “a flight from the pursuit of historical and propositional truth to a preoccupation with mystical experience.”¹¹⁵ Postmodernism rejects divine providence.

¹¹¹ The adherents of Twelve Step programs “are the *source* of truth—because truth is true if they really believe it—not the *discoverers* of truth, which is true whether they realize it or not. ... Branches of twelve-step spirituality are distinctively postmodern in the way *personal interpretation* or *experience* and *personal empowerment* are substituted for *truth* about God” (Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 209).

¹¹² Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 199f. Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 50. Cp. solipsism, which is the belief that the human self knows and can know nothing but its own conscious states, being cut off from (or denying) the reality of anything outside its own mind.

¹¹³ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 208, 212, 226. Postmodern denial of self is primarily a denial of the modernist self and its complete autonomy and rational freedom (208).

¹¹⁴ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 210.

¹¹⁵ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 211.

- Virtues. Cardinal virtues are **omni-tolerance**¹¹⁶ and **anti-judgmentalism**. Mortal sins are adhering to absolute, objective truth and ethics. Persons guilty of these mortal sins cannot be tolerated. “The only wrong idea is to believe in truth; the only sin is to believe in sin.”¹¹⁷
 - I have a right to my desires. No one has the right to criticize my desire and my choices.¹¹⁸ Since people create their own reality (i.e., something is true *because* I believe it), by challenging the truth claims of another’s religion, they believe that we devalue the person, who is the source of his or her own truth. Rejecting the *content* of belief is assumed to be the same as rejecting the believer of that belief.¹¹⁹
 - The term “‘respect’ is a code-word for ‘never criticizing my view or actions.’ Respect is positive regard *without* judgment. ‘Respecting diversity,’ for instance, means never trying to change anyone from the way they are, even if they are behaving self-destructively. Any criticism of others indicates disrespect.”¹²⁰ [This precludes Biblical training, exhortation, correction, admonishment, rebuke, etc.]

¹¹⁶ By the term “tolerance,” postmodernists seem to mean never criticizing a politically-correct, oppressed group, e.g., women, non-white races, homosexuals, etc. (Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 112).

¹¹⁷ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 181, 195f.

¹¹⁸ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 195, 199.

¹¹⁹ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 202.

¹²⁰ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 241.

- The postmodern call to “humility” means to avoid claiming to know anything for sure.¹²¹
- Postmodernists demand others’ approval of their sins (Ro 1:32; Gn 19:9).
- Collective responsibility and collective guilt have **replaced personal responsibility**.¹²² (Human beings are what their cultural environments make them. Their thinking is a social construct.¹²³)
- Family. Postmodernism destroys: men’s and women’s creational, complementary roles; the sanctity of heterosexual marriage; the covenantal headship and cohesiveness in marriage and family; and parental authority over their children.¹²⁴ Postmodernists are characterized by rootlessness and impermanent relationships.¹²⁵
- Sanctity of human life. Personhood is a social construct; human beings are not conceived, they are defined.¹²⁶ Postmodernism destroys the sanctity of human life.
- Psychology. Consistent with its irrationality, postmodernism embraces conflicting psychological therapies.¹²⁷ Postmodernism produces people who are passive, cynical, insecure, peer-dependent, and easily manipulated.¹²⁸ Because they lack a sense of identity, they tend to be highly oriented to

¹²¹ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 248.

¹²² Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 196.

¹²³ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 35f.

¹²⁴ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 80.

¹²⁵ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 86.

¹²⁶ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 41.

¹²⁷ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 180.

¹²⁸ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 83f.

playing roles (cf. hypocrisy in Mt 23:27–28). They stress style over substance. They are highly geared toward fashion.¹²⁹ Postmodernism fosters a radical sense of **victimization**.¹³⁰

- Science. With the discovery of quantum physics and relativity, science no longer provides universal, verifiable laws.¹³¹ The actual nature of things is unknowable. Scientific results are merely the social opinions of the scientific guild. Students conclude that studying science and math is a waste of time.¹³² Quantum physics is used to justify scientific mysticism and monism.¹³³ Non-scientific, Eastern medical treatments (e.g., Taoist acupuncture, Hindu and Buddhist meditation, and other new age medical practices) are in vogue—and are taught in many nursing schools.¹³⁴ Postmodernist philosopher Jean-François Lyotard (1924–1998) believed that postmodernism marks the end of science.¹³⁵
- Education. Postmodernist education is primarily for the purposes of social engineering (collective thinking with no independent thought; trained for serfdom in global government) and values indoctrination (anti-traditional authorities, e.g., heterosexual, monogamous families and Christian churches; relativism; multiculturalism/diversity;

¹²⁹ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 84f.

¹³⁰ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 161, 15.

¹³¹ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 51–56. Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 182.

¹³² Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 246. Is it any wonder that American students score so low in science and math compared to students in other countries?

¹³³ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 188–190, 194.

¹³⁴ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 182. Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 58–62 (rejecting informed consent, 74).

¹³⁵ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 46–48.

spiritualistic environmentalism). Such “education” features: group projects; group grades or no grades; the rejection of standard grammar in English; and new math with no wrong answers. Teachers must not downgrade or correct students for wrong answers, so as to safeguard their fragile self-esteem, which is the *prerequisite* for learning. One of the goals of postmodern education is to empower students to fight for revolutionary social change.¹³⁶

- Economics: **socialism**¹³⁷ (especially fascism). Postmodernism fosters an **entitlement mentality** and **welfare rights**.¹³⁸
- Politics. Postmodernism **destroys individual liberty**. Lawyers and judges interpret the US Constitution to mean what it means to them, not what its writers intended. Propaganda and rhetoric replace rational pleas.¹³⁹ “When truth dies, power fills the vacuum.”¹⁴⁰ “The only alternative to transcendent, absolute values is a power struggle in which might makes right.”¹⁴¹ The naked exercise of power, unrestrained by moral limits (Jdg 21:25), is a formula first for anarchy/terrorism and then for totalitarianism.¹⁴² Postmodernism fosters **totalitarian fascism**.

¹³⁶ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 121.

¹³⁷ There are three main types of socialism: (1) Fascism/corporatism (e.g., European mercantilism, Italian Fascism under Mussolini, German Nazism under Hitler); (2) Marxism/Communism/Bolshevism/dialectical materialism (Russia, China, North Vietnam, Cuba); and (3) English Fabian socialism.

¹³⁸ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 184, 79.

¹³⁹ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 45.

¹⁴⁰ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 45.

¹⁴¹ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 160.

¹⁴² Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 198, 159, 188.

- Globalization. Activist postmoderns work toward a centralized, technocratic, one-world government, having a one-world socialistic economy, and a one-world syncretized religion.¹⁴³
- Digital entertainment (e.g., TV, movies): undercuts any sense of coherence, consistency, and unity with its barrage of constantly-changing images; blurs the line between truth and fiction; creates a communal mass mind;¹⁴⁴ and dehumanizes man through violent bloodshed and sexual immorality. “Entertainment, gratification, and sensory stimulation displace reason, morality, and truth.”¹⁴⁵ “When the image dominates the word, rational discourse ebbs.”¹⁴⁶

American “culture can be characterized as postmodern because the basics of modernism—confidence in reason, personal autonomy, and human progress—are rejected on a wide scale. ... Propositional truth is out. In its place is personal, subjective mystical experience.”¹⁴⁷

Impact of postmodernism within the Western Christian church

- Postmodernism radically changed Biblical hermeneutics by rejecting the grammatical-historical method (which seeks to understand the meaning of the text in light of its historical and cultural setting) for a subjective “reader-centered” or “reader-

¹⁴³ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 203.

¹⁴⁴ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 81f. Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity against the Challenges of Postmodernism*, 281–295.

¹⁴⁵ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 82.

¹⁴⁶ Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity against the Challenges of Postmodernism*, 284.

¹⁴⁷ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 212.

response” hermeneutic.¹⁴⁸ It cast off all the gains made in Biblical studies over the centuries.¹⁴⁹

- Postmodernism rejects systematic theology,¹⁵⁰ while cherishing theological, logical paradoxes, antinomies, and mystery. Theology must be constructed from human experience, not divine revelation.
- Postmodernism rejects reason/logic. Consequently, churchgoers may affirm Christian doctrines while holding to reincarnation and practicing Buddhist meditation. “The moment we agree that Christianity teaches contradictions, we lose the ability to stand for truth. ... Standing up for truth and revelation requires that we stand up for reason and the *perspicuity*—understandability—of language in Scripture.”¹⁵¹
- Worship and sermons are consumer-oriented (man-centered), crafted to make an aesthetic impression (using dynamic visual effects and catchy, simplistic, jargon-filled slogans¹⁵²) and to

¹⁴⁸ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 87ff. “A growing number of scholars around the world are placing culture above Scripture, so that authority resides in culture rather than within the Bible. These scholars do not bring their culture to be critiqued and interpreted by Scripture, They bring Scripture to be critiqued and interpreted by their culture” (*Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery, 220; twenty examples are given on pp. 221f).

¹⁴⁹ Carl F.H. Henry, “Postmodernism: The New Spectre?” in *Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery, 44. For a scholarly treatment of hermeneutics that refutes postmodern hermeneutics see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998).

¹⁵⁰ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 104f.

¹⁵¹ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 253, 258.

¹⁵² C.S. Lewis captured the problem in *The Screwtape Letters*, where a senior demon, Screwtape, instructs a lower-ranking demon, Wormwood, in the art of deception: “Jargon, not argument, is your best ally. ... The trouble with

give the consumers positive feelings—not to convey Biblical truth (contra Col 3:16). (God requires order and intelligibility in the church assembly, which promote edification, 1 Cor 14:16, 26, 33.)

- Psychology replaced Biblical counseling.¹⁵³ In some cases, the client’s reports of victimization cannot be judged as being unreal; if the victim feels victimized, that is his/her reality—whether the alleged abuse actually occurred or not.¹⁵⁴
- Desire for truth (taught through Biblical exposition, systematic theology, presuppositional apologetics, etc.) has been replaced by a craving for subjective experiences, especially supernatural experiences¹⁵⁵ (including Kundalini spirits¹⁵⁶), erecting “an idol of Christian thrill-seeking”¹⁵⁷ for adrenalin junkies. Like the ancient Athenians, many are always chasing after, and infatuated with “some new thing” (Ac 17:21).
- Bible studies are not concerned with the author’s meaning in the text, but with what the text means to you. The Bible can never be misunderstood, and there is no such thing as a wrong interpretation. From this perspective, how could the Biblical text ever challenge or transform its readers?

argument is that it moves the whole struggle onto the Enemy’s own ground” (8).

¹⁵³ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 192; cf. 180.

¹⁵⁴ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 240.

¹⁵⁵ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 211.

¹⁵⁶ Andrew Strom, *Kundalini Warning: Are False Spirits Invading the Church?* (n.p.: Revival School Publications, 2010)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2X1HC-3s3ul>.
http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Kundalini+Warning+false+spirits+invade+church&aq=f.

¹⁵⁷ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 250.

- Spiritual disciplines have turned to new age mysticism (e.g., Eastern meditation, contemplative prayer, labyrinth, etc.).¹⁵⁸
- Religion is a preference in which a person chooses whatever he/she finds to be aesthetically pleasing. People believe in what they like (e.g., God’s love); they discard whatever they do not want to believe in, i.e., what they do not find pleasure in (e.g., distasteful doctrines: God’s sovereignty, election, predestination, original sin, God’s moral law, God’s demand for holiness, God’s just-wrath, unending, conscious torment in

¹⁵⁸ Pamela Frost, “Pagan Contemplative Techniques,” in *On Global Wizardry: Techniques of Pagan Spirituality and a Christian Response*, ed. Peter Jones (Escondido, CA: Main Entry Editions, 2010), 186–202. Marcia Montenegro, “Contemplating Contemplative Prayer: Is It Really Prayer?” http://www.christiananswersforthenewage.org/Articles_ContemplativePrayer1.html. (There are many helpful articles on Montenegro’s website.) Gary Gilley, “Spiritual Formation,” <http://www.svchapel.org/resources/articles/20-christian-living/753-spiritual-formation>. <http://www.newswithviews.com/West/marsha244.htm>. Ray Yungen, *A Time of Departing: How Ancient Mystical Practices are Uniting Christians with the World’s Religions*, 2nd ed. (Silverton, OR: Lighthouse Trails Publishing, 2006), pp. 64f, 83f, 86, 90, 156, 174, 178f, 185. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4qxwgtQi2o>.

D.A. Carson writes: “Nowadays spiritual disciplines may include Bible reading, meditation, worship, giving away money, fasting, solitude, fellowship, deeds of service, evangelism, almsgiving, creation care, journaling, missionary work, and more. It may include vows of celibacy, self-flagellation, and **chanting mantras**. In popular usage, some of these so-called spiritual disciplines are entirely divorced from any specific doctrine whatsoever, Christian or otherwise: they are merely a matter of technique. That is why people sometimes say, “For your doctrine, by all means commit yourselves to evangelical confessionalism. But when it comes to the spiritual disciplines, turn to Catholicism or perhaps **Buddhism**.” What is universally presupposed by the expression “spiritual discipline” is that such disciplines are intended to increase our spirituality. From a Christian perspective, however, it is simply not possible to increase one’s spirituality without possessing the Holy Spirit and submitting to his transforming instruction and power. Techniques are never neutral. They are invariably loaded with theological presuppositions, often unrecognized.”

hell, etc.). Religion is not about what is true, but what one likes and wants. This new way of thinking about religion is a magnet to heresies and cults.¹⁵⁹ Syncretism with other religions is also perfectly acceptable.¹⁶⁰ Religion cannot be other than a preference since, “Unless truth is objective, it cannot be declared to others, cannot be taught to others, cannot be required of others.”¹⁶¹

- Evangelism omits: the universal fall of mankind into sin; God’s holy law; God’s just-wrath against sinners; hell; Jesus’ substitutionary atonement; and Jesus’ Lordship. Jesus’ death does not atone for sin; it is merely an example of love.¹⁶² Many are saved apart from knowledge of, and faith in Jesus Christ (inclusivism).¹⁶³
- “Since postmodernists are oriented to power, they will be drawn to power churches which promise miracles to solve every problem [little gods decreeing health and wealth],

¹⁵⁹ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 193f, 212.

¹⁶⁰ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 200.

¹⁶¹ David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 282. Cf. Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).

¹⁶² Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 214f. Cp. Robert E. Fugate, “The Contents of the Gospel Message”; idem., “Evangelizing Pagans in Acts 14 & 17.”

¹⁶³ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 214. Regarding inclusivism see Robert L. Reymond, “The ‘Very Pernicious and Detestable’ Doctrine of Inclusivism,” *The Trinity Review* #s 219 & 220 (May–June 2003); available at <http://trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=107>; reprinted in *For the King: The Trinity Review, 1999–2008*, eds. John W. Robbins and Thomas W. Juodaitis (Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation, 2011), 253–262; also reprinted in Reymond, *Contending for the Faith: Lines in the Sand that Strengthen the Church* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, Christian Focus Publications, 2005), 367–388.

political clout, exponential numerical growth, and success after success.”¹⁶⁴

- In some postmodern “Christian” academic circles, true(!) Christianity is Gnosticism (e.g., Princeton University professor Elaine Pagels). Through the believer’s direct, personal, mystical union with Christ, the knowledge and the authority of the individual believer is equal to that of Christ’s Apostles and whatever Scriptures they might have penned.¹⁶⁵
- Feminists, absorbed with the male-abuser/female-victim paradigm, believe that “the Bible is meaningful only as it speaks a liberating word to women. Where the Christian message no longer resonates with feminist experience, it is rejected as false or irrelevant.”¹⁶⁶
- Some postmoderns want to form a one-world religion that avoids the use of reason and majors on personal, mystical, religious experience.¹⁶⁷
- **Emergent church** = postmodern presuppositions (e.g., no absolute truth and ethics) + old Liberal theology + New Age mysticism.

Leading proponents: Brian McLaren, Rob Bell, Doug Pagitt, Tony Jones, Dan Kimball. They draw from and promote “the arch pagan philosopher,” Ken Wilber (Dr. Peter Jones’ term).

¹⁶⁴ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 213. Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 240.

¹⁶⁵ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 216. Some liberal “scholars” have taught that there was no difference between truth and error, orthodoxy and heresy in the apostolic church; as rival church factions contended for their viewpoint, the winners became the “orthodox.”

¹⁶⁶ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 224.

¹⁶⁷ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 231.

Other supportive leaders include: Robert Schuller, Richard Foster, Brennan Manning, Bill Hybels, Dallas Willard, Bruce Wilkinson, Eugene Peterson, John Ortberg, John Eldredge, Dr. Robert Webber, Tony Campolo, and Rick Warren.

Key tenets:

- The Bible is not absolute truth;
- No one can know absolute truth;
- Beliefs are based more on feelings and subjective spiritual experiences than on the Bible;
- Jesus' death on the cross was not a substitutionary death to atone for our sins;
- Do not believe in a future eschatological judgment or a literal hell;
- Embrace mystical practices not taught by the Bible.

Theological summary of postmodernism

Viewed theologically, postmodernism consists of: rejecting the true God; destroying the Creator-creature distinction; deifying man (individually, but particularly collectively in the community and in the state) (Gn 3:5); and idolatrous man-worship and nature worship (Ro 1:18–25ff).

Refuting postmodernism¹⁶⁸

1. The claim that we have no access to reality (that there are no facts, no truths-of-the-matter) is itself a claim to truth and reality, which we cannot know.
2. The claim that language cannot make unambiguous claims itself uses univocal language to teach this truth. If all language is arbitrary and relative, it is arbitrary and relative to assert that language is arbitrary and relative.

¹⁶⁸ Several of these rebuttals are taken from James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 236–238. Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 53, 245f.

3. Postmodernism’s critique of the autonomy and sufficiency of human reason rests on the autonomy and sufficiency of human reason. They claim no one can know objective truth, but this assertion itself is a claim to objective truth. When postmodernists assert that “nothing is certain,” they are claiming certainty.¹⁶⁹
4. The rejection of all metanarratives is itself a metanarrative (i.e., a universal truth claim). Thus postmodernism is “the most totalizing of all views because it completely discounts all alternative understandings.”¹⁷⁰
5. If all linguistic utterances are power plays, then the utterance that all linguistic utterances are power plays is also a power play. Thus you should apply the hermeneutic of suspicion and beware of postmodernists’ attempts to exert power over you and control you.
6. If we are only the product of the blind forces of nature, then so is our view that we are only the product of the blind forces of nature and society. We do not have the intellectual freedom or ability to choose to believe or to disbelieve anything at all.
7. The idea that no one can escape the prison of language (in thoughts or words) results in total skepticism—no one can know reality-as-it-is.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Cf. William L. Craig, in *Apologetics: Five Views*, ed. Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 181–183; Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity against the Challenges of Postmodernism*, 103f, 106. Even the intellectual act of doubting demands social rules for speech acts to preclude incoherent nonsense (Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 318f).

¹⁷⁰ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 201.

¹⁷¹ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 38–41.

8. Modernist assumption: Postmodernists have imported from modernism the mistaken, unacknowledged assumption that God is irrelevant to the function and character of language.¹⁷²
9. Circular reasoning (begging the question): Postmodernists have simply assumed that God cannot reveal Himself to human beings in the way that He does—in His work in Christ, in the Bible, and in general revelation (Ro 1:18–23). Thus postmodernists have unconsciously absorbed at the beginning the conclusion that they reach at the end.¹⁷³
10. The postmodern approach to language is built upon the insights of the social sciences (e.g., anthropology, sociology, psychology). However, the social sciences are founded on the now-discredited worldview of modernism.¹⁷⁴ Thus postmodernists have sawn off the tree limb they are sitting on.
11. In rejecting universal logic, there can be no reasoning or communication between different linguistic communities—especially internationally. So what is the point of globalism? Postmodernism chains us in a linguistic prison of division, hateful victimizing, racial and sexual hostilities, local and national civil wars, as well as international wars.
12. If science is a figment of culture, then why can scientists from different cultures replicate experiments that yield exactly the same results?¹⁷⁵
13. Postmodernists exaggerate when they claim people are prisoners of culture and language. Examples abound of

¹⁷² Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 316.

¹⁷³ Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 315f.

¹⁷⁴ Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 316f. William L. Craig, in *Apologetics: Five Views*, ed. Steven B. Cowan, 182f, citing Thomas Nagel.

¹⁷⁵ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 52.

individuals who have turned against the views of their own culture, thus demonstrating a level of individual freedom. Such examples include Jesus Christ, the Old Testament prophets, and the Apostle Paul, each of whom confronted their culture and its religious practices in many respects. Some individuals have reformed their cultures. Thus cultural determinism is not true.

14. Postmodern psychologists and counselors work to achieve a better state of affairs for their clients, while denying that such value judgments (e.g., “better”) are valid.¹⁷⁶
15. Postmodernists’ assertion that racism and bigotry are, by definition, sins only of dominant groups, is contradicted by the Biblical doctrines of creation (Ac 17:26) and fall (which produced the total depravity of every person¹⁷⁷).
16. Postmoderns are mistaken that all human thought is rooted in one’s communal language/s. Developmental psychologists have observed that infants think prior to learning and speaking their community’s language—studying and recognizing people’s faces, objects, and events in their world.¹⁷⁸ Of course, mothers throughout history have known that their babies think at a pre-linguistic stage. Babies recognize and cry for their mother. They communicate that they are hungry or not feeling well, or are insecure when their

¹⁷⁶ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 160.

¹⁷⁷ Robert E. Fugate, “What Is Man? Man’s Origin, Purpose, Nature, Problem,” 9–16.

¹⁷⁸ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 54 (citing Donald McIntosh). Cf. Noam Chomsky’s theory of universal grammar, which postulates that the ability to learn grammar is hard-wired into the human brain. The universal grammar theory suggests that linguistic ability manifests itself without being taught, and that there are properties that all natural human languages share (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_grammar).

three-year-old sister or brother picks them up. They know their mother and father prior to saying “ma ma” or “da da.” These words become a “handle” to address or refer to people or things already known.

In sum, nothing that postmodernism affirms is to be taken as objective truth. Postmodernism’s absolute relativism relativizes postmodernism. Essentially, postmodernist argumentation is designed to prove that no proof is possible. Among postmodernists there is a consensus that consensus is impossible; postmodernists are having authoritative announcements of the disappearance of authority; postmodernist scholars are writing comprehensive narratives on how comprehensive narratives are unthinkable.¹⁷⁹ Thus postmodernism is utterly self-refuting, incoherent, and irrational.¹⁸⁰ “If it is true, then it is false.”¹⁸¹ There is no reason to believe it. It is not true. Since “postmodernist claims are not objectively true, then they are just the arbitrary opinions of certain people that we are free to ignore.”¹⁸²

When postmoderns hide behind the necessity or the validity of **irrationality**, we rebut: then postmodernism is the same as modernism; to believe in absolute truth and absolute ethics is the same as not to believe in absolute truth and absolute ethics; to be intolerant is the same as to be tolerant; to believe that white males of European descent should rule minority races is the same as not to believe that white males of European descent should rule minority races; to believe that homosexuality is a perversion and crime is the same as not to believe that homosexuality is a perversion and crime; if you stole the car of a postmodern professor, it is not true that you stole his car; etc.

¹⁷⁹ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 60.

¹⁸⁰ Robert E. Fugate, *The Bible: God’s Words to You*, 35–38.

¹⁸¹ William L. Craig, in *Apologetics: Five Views*, ed. Steven B. Cowan, 182.

¹⁸² William L. Craig, in *Apologetics: Five Views*, ed. Steven B. Cowan, 183.

Thus to believe in postmodernism is nihilistic¹⁸³ (i.e., believing in nothing, having no allegiances and no purposes), insane, and suicidal—for both the individual and for the culture.

Postmodernist ethics are self-refuting

Furthermore, proponents of postmodernism cannot live by what they profess to believe. “Postmodernists, more than most people, complain about how various power structures are unfair, and they are always demanding sensitivity, tolerance, and justice”—which are all transcendent, authoritative moral absolutes!¹⁸⁴ “Minorities only hope for fair treatment is that society becomes convinced that right and wrong exist in the objective sense—the very thing postmodernists deny!”¹⁸⁵

With regard to the supreme virtue of postmodernism, tolerance: Postmodernists are supremely intolerant of any and every religious or moral absolute.

“Postmodernists have ‘tolerance’ only for themselves. Every other culture must in the end submit to their particular vision of how much cultures can actually know. Postmodernists are supremely arrogant, because their postmodernist vision has relieved them of the responsibility really to listen to anyone else. They are ‘tolerant’ of all cultures when all cultures submit to their hegemony.”¹⁸⁶

With regard to the postmodern virtue of diversity:

“Postmodernists laud cultural diversity, but if there is no universal humanness, why respect people from other cultures? ... If there are no universal principles, why act

¹⁸³ Carl F.H. Henry, “Postmodernism: The New Spectre?” in *Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery, 35f.

¹⁸⁴ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 62; cf. 197.

¹⁸⁵ Dennis McCallum, ed., *The Death of Truth*, 248.

¹⁸⁶ Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 310.

morally toward him, or, as we used to say, why treat him *humanely*? Why not treat him like a rat or a pig or a dog? If he is utterly different from me and if the key to our relationship is how much power I have over him, why should I not turn him into my slave? The anti-humanism of the postmodernists cannot sustain any of the so-called ‘human values.’ Freedom, individuality, self-worth, dignity—these are social constructions. Empathy, kindness, altruism, love—these are masks for oppression. The individual human being is swallowed up by culture; cultures are swallowed up by nature.”¹⁸⁷

“All of these postmodernist concepts were tenets of [twentieth-century] fascism. ... Fascism is coming back.”¹⁸⁸ On what basis do some postmoderns believe that democratic libertarianism is much superior to Nazi fascism?¹⁸⁹ French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926–1984), one of the intellectual pillars of postmodernism, argues passionately that liberty is good and repression is wrong.¹⁹⁰ But why is repression wrong? American philosopher Richard Rorty (1931–2007) admitted that “when the secret police come, when the torturers violate the innocent, there is” no ground on which to appeal that what they are doing is wrong.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 78f.

¹⁸⁸ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 79. Cf. Veith, *Fascism: Modern and Postmodern* (Mussoorie, U.P., India: Nivedit Good Books Distributors, 2000).

¹⁸⁹ Atheist-communist Jean-Paul Satre remarked, “Tomorrow, after my death, certain people may decide to establish fascism, and the others may be cowardly or miserable enough to let them get away with it. At that moment, fascism will be the truth of man” (cited by Alister E. McGrath, *Intellectuals Don’t Need God and Other Myths*, 179).

¹⁹⁰ Alister E. McGrath, *Intellectuals Don’t Need God and Other Myths*, 179f.

¹⁹¹ Alister E. McGrath, *Intellectuals Don’t Need God and Other Myths*, 180f. “Ethics also seems to fall largely outside the notice of *American* postmodernists. ... The notions of reformation and correction seem to find no permissible place” (Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Thiselton Companion to Christian Theology*, 687).

Underneath postmodernism's mask of pluralistic tolerance lies sinister authoritarianism, for, "If we cannot appeal to any recognized criticism, authoritarianism becomes inevitable."¹⁹²

"Postmodernism is unlivable. ... No one uses a postmodernist hermeneutic when reading the label of a medicine bottle."¹⁹³ How would a postmodernist professor react to a student telling her that her lecture against Christianity was deconstructed to mean that she hated Afro-Americans, homosexuals, feminists, and Muslims, and that she wanted to murder the university President? Try telling the IRS that you interpret the tax regulations to mean that you deserve a million dollar refund! Or, why not tell a police officer at a roadside stop that you are the Governor and that he had better back off? Postmodernists cannot consistently put their beliefs into practice. They cannot live by what they profess to believe. In reality, postmodernism is "the new absolutism."¹⁹⁴

Biblical theology of language

We have seen that postmodernism is totally self-refuting and irrational. Now, let's examine what God teaches about language and its usage. The Bible absolutely refutes the lynchpin of postmodernism, that language cannot convey truth. The Bible, God's truthful, sufficient Word, teaches that God has chosen language as the primary medium of His Self-revelation. The Biblical theology of language is based upon the doctrines of: the living, speaking, tri-personal God; propositional revelation; and man being the image of God.

1. Origin of language.

The eternal, self-existent, tri-personal God uses language, i.e., God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit use

¹⁹² Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Thiselton Companion to Christian Theology*, 688.

¹⁹³ William L. Craig, in *Apologetics: Five Views*, ed. Steven B. Cowan, 181.

¹⁹⁴ William L. Craig, in *Apologetics: Five Views*, ed. Steven B. Cowan, 181.

language to communicate with each other (Gn 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Is 6:8; Jn 16:13–15; 11:42; 17). The triune God also used language to create the universe, speaking it into existence (Gn 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26; Pss 33:6, 9; 148:5; Heb 11:3). Thus language in both the mind of God and in His spoken word preceded creation.¹⁹⁵ God then blessed His creation (Gn 1:22, 28–30). He exercised His sovereignty by assigning names to material objects that He created (Gn 1:5, 8, 10). Indeed, all of Scripture presents God as the living God Who speaks!¹⁹⁶ The word of God is dynamic and powerful (Heb 1:3; 4:12).¹⁹⁷ The Second Person of the Trinity is the Logos, i.e., the “Word” (Jn 1:1, 14; 1 Jn 1:1; 5:7; Rv 19:13).

2. Possibility of communication.

Human language is possible because the tri-personal God (the first language user, Gn 1) created man in His image: a rational being (Gn 1:27; Col 3:10; Eph 4:24; cp. 2 Pt 2:12; Jude 10),¹⁹⁸ having the ability to speak.

Since “God spoke to create the world, then the world from its beginning, and down to its roots, is structured by God’s

¹⁹⁵ “When God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light [Gn 1:3], the word [light] (and therefore the idea) chronologically and logically preceded the visible light. . . . Language precedes creation” (Marla Perkins Bevin, “Linguistics and the Bible,” *The Trinity Review* 262 [December 2006], 2; available at <http://trinityfoundation.org/PDF/The%20Trinity%20Review%2000230%20Review2621206LinguisticsandtheBible.pdf>; reprinted in *For the King: The Trinity Review, 1999–2008*, eds. John W. Robbins and Thomas W. Juodaitis, 434).

¹⁹⁶ Phrases such as “thus says the LORD,” “the LORD said,” “the word of the LORD came to,” “Hear the word of the LORD,” etc. occur over 3,800 times in the Old Testament alone (Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949], 110)!

¹⁹⁷ Robert E. Fugate, *The Bible: God’s Words to You*, 711f.

¹⁹⁸ Man’s rationality is demonstrated in his knowledge and his ability to use logic. Man can reason abstractly (e.g., analyzing philosophical concepts, ethical problems, etc.) and develop new technology on the basis of scientific study.

language.”¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, “God has implanted the *a priori* human aptitudes for knowing and harmonized them with the [so-called] laws of nature. . . . God has also implanted in us the organizing principles of thought, which lies behind language as its necessary condition. Communication of information is possible, therefore, because we who use language are enlightened by the divine Logos [Jn 1:9; cf. Ac 17:28]; that is, we are in possession of certain innate ideas that reflect God’s mind.”²⁰⁰ For example, because man’s mind contains the idea of “God,” man can use the words or sounds “God,” “*Deus*,” “*Theos*,” or “*Elohim*.”²⁰¹ Communication between people is possible because all minds have at least some thoughts in common.²⁰² Simply stated, human language is a good gift from God.

Human language is complex and abstract, expressed through thought, speech, and writing.

3. Primary purposes of language: rational thought and the communication of some of one’s thoughts to another person.

We have already noted that the Persons of the Godhead use language to communicate with each other. Language is also used by God to converse with man—even prior to any human-human communication (Gn 1:28–30; 2:16–17). The Second Person of the Trinity, the Logos (i.e., the “Word,” Jn 1:1, 14; 1

¹⁹⁹ Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 24.

²⁰⁰ Ronald H. Nash, “Gordon H. Clark,” in *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993), 189.

²⁰¹ Gordon H. Clark, “God and Logic,” *The Trinity Review* (Nov–Dec 1980), 6; available at <http://trinityfoundation.org/PDF/The%20Trinity%20Review%200015a%20GodandLogic.pdf>; reprinted in *Against the World*, ed. John W. Robbins (Hobbs, NM: The Trinity Foundation, 1996), 52–56. Gordon H. Clark, *Language and Theology* (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1980), 139.

²⁰² Gordon H. Clark, *Language and Theology*, 152, 142.

Jn 1:1; 5:7; Rv 19:13), is the mediator of all God's revelations.²⁰³

Language is used by man to worship God and to converse with God, and to converse with his fellow men.²⁰⁴ Indeed, God created man for the purpose of fellowship with Him. Human language also serves man's ultimate purpose of glorifying God (1 Cor 10:31; Ro 11:36; Col 3:16–17). With regard to conversing with one's fellow man, language makes possible teaching, preaching the gospel of King Jesus, convincing, encouraging, comforting, exhorting, admonishing, correcting, rebuking, etc.

4. Adequacy of human language.

"The omnipresence of God guarantees that God himself extends the presence of language beyond my personal world.

²⁰³ "The mediating agent in all divine revelation is the Eternal Logos—preexistent, incarnate, and now glorified. Just as he is the divine Agent in creation, redemption and judgment, so also the *Logos* who became incarnate in Jesus Christ is the divine Agent in revelation. God who creates, redeems and judges by his Word (cf. Gen. 1; John 1:5) also reveals himself by that selfsame living Word. . . . This emphasis that the eternal Logos is mediator of all divine revelation guards against two prevalent errors, namely, that of reducing all revelation to the revelation found in Jesus of Nazareth; and that of isolating general revelation by treating revelation outside of Jesus of Nazareth as something independent of the Logos who became incarnate" (Carl F.H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6 vols. [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1976–1983], 2:11f). Henry expounds this thesis in 3:203–215.

²⁰⁴ "Man's endowment with rationality, his innate ideas and a priori categories, his ability to think and speak were given to him by God for the essential purpose of receiving a verbal revelation, of approaching God in prayer, and conversing with other men about God and spiritual realities" (Gordon H. Clark, *Religion, Reason and Revelation* [Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1986], 135).

"Rationality belongs to persons. Persons have rational capacities, but not rocks, trees, and subpersonal creatures. If the [linguistic] rules are rational, which linguists assume they are, then they are also personal" (Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 71).

All the world conforms to God's language, because God created it."²⁰⁵ God created human language, and He is able to use it with perfect precision. God wrote in human language (Ex 24:12; 31:18; 32:15–16; 34:1; Jn 8:6, 8; cf. Dn 5:5, 24). "The Second Person of the Trinity, the *Logos*, had no difficulty expressing divine truth in the human languages of Aramaic, Greek, and Hebrew while He walked on Earth; and the Third Person, the Holy Spirit, wrote the perfect, completely accurate, fully adequate, and inerrant Scriptures in human language."²⁰⁶ Thus human language is adequate to accomplish those purposes that the omnipotent God intended to accomplish through it.²⁰⁷ God is both "the Creator and Lord of human language ('Who made man's mouth?' [Ex 4:11]), who is able to use language however He wills in order to accomplish His purposes."²⁰⁸ "If reason, i.e., logic, which makes speech possible, is a God-given faculty, it must be adequate to its

²⁰⁵ Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 312.

²⁰⁶ John W. Robbins, "The Heresy Matrix: Part 2," *The Trinity Review* (October 2003), 3; available at <http://trinityfoundation.org/PDF/The%20Trinity%20Review%200204a%20TheHeresyMatrix.pdf>; reprinted in *For the King: The Trinity Review, 1999–2008*, eds. John W. Robbins and Thomas W. Juodaitis, 275.

²⁰⁷ When unbelievers or even professing Christians assert that human language is incapable of expressing literal truth, ask them, Is your theory as you have framed it literally true? (Robert L. Reymond, *Preach the Word!* [Edinburgh, Scotland: Rutherford House, 1988], 9f).

²⁰⁸ Wayne A. Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture," *Scripture and Truth*, eds. Donald A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 20. Cf. Gordon H. Clark, *Language and Theology*; idem., *God's Hammer* (Jefferson, MD: Trinity, 1987), 118; idem., "Inspiration and Language," *Religion, Reason and Revelation*, 111–150; James I. Packer, "The Adequacy of Human Language," *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 214, 220; Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 38; Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*, 5 vols. (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1982), 1:99f; Philip E. Hughes, *The True Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 57f.

divinely appointed task. And its task is the reception of divinely revealed information and the systematization of these propositions in dogmatic theology.”²⁰⁹

5. Words correspond to metaphysical reality (contra literary deconstruction).

In the Genesis account God Himself named several physical objects, e.g., firmament/expanse, light, day, night, sky/heaven, land/earth, seas, lights (Gn 1:3, 5–6, 8, 10, 14). These terms already existed as concepts in God’s mind. “The created thing and its meaning correspond to the meaning of God’s utterance,”²¹⁰ which proceeded from the mind of God. Elsewhere in Scripture, God named several people—their new names portraying their character or callings. God brought the animals and birds to His image-bearer, Adam, so he could give them appropriate names (Gn 2:19–20).

6. Language is a spiritual battleground.

Satan uses deceitful language and lies to tempt man to sin against God (Gn 3:1–5, 13; Jn 8:44; Mt 4:1–10; Rv 12:9; 2 Cor 11:3; 10:4–5; Ac 5:3). Indeed, the New Testament Greek word translated “devil” (*diabolos*) means slanderer or accuser. After the fall, depraved man imitates Satan in the sinful use of language (Gn 3:12–13; Jer 23:36; Ac 13:10; 20:30; Ro 16:18; 2 Cor 4:2; Eph 4:14; Col 2:4, 8; 2 Tim 2:17–18; 2 Pt 2:1, 18; 3:16).

As a form of judgment, God, in His providential rule over all things, sometimes confuses the thought and speech of hardened sinners, thereby preventing them from effectively communicating with each other and carrying out their evil plans. A poignant example is God confusing human language at the Tower of Babel, “that they may not understand one

²⁰⁹ Gordon H. Clark, *Revelation and the Bible*, ed. Carl F.H. Henry (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1958), 41 = *God’s Hammer: The Bible and Its Critics*, 85.

²¹⁰ Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 27.

another's speech" (Gn 11:4–9). (Note also God sending a lying spirit into Ahab's false prophets, 1 Ki 22:20–23.) Another divine judgment was Jesus teaching in parables so His hearers would not understand His teaching (Mt 13:10–16 // Mk 4:11–12 // Lk 8:10; Is 6:9–10). God has even given His covenant people Biblical imprecatory prayers that petition Him to bring confusion on His enemies (e.g., "Confuse the wicked, O Lord, confound their speech," Ps 55:9 NIV).

Attacks on the usefulness and objectivity of language to communicate propositional truth are automatically attacks on Biblical revelation. Christians should respond like their Lord: "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men" (Mt 16:23)!

Miscellaneous

Christians are not to define themselves by their social position, their culture, their race, or their gender (Gal 3:28; Col 3:10–11; Lk 3:8; Jn 8:39, 44; 1 Cor 4:7; 7:21–22; Ac 17:26). Christians' identity comes from their being in union with Christ. In Christ's church, there is the balance between unity and diversity, community and individuality (1 Cor 12). This reflects the balance between the one and the many in the three Persons of the Trinity.²¹¹

The cost and the power of holding to the truth

"One of the main reasons the early Christians were persecuted so cruelly was that they claimed to possess exclusive truth. ... The most vital theological movements in church history have been those which went *against* the trends of their time. ... For those who eventually brought down the monolith of communism, ending the modern era, the issue was always 'truth.'"²¹²

²¹¹ Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 88f.

²¹² Gene E. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 229f, 232

Bibliography

- Carl J. Broggi, "Postmodernism," *World's Religions and Cults*, eds. Bodie Hodge and Roger Patterson, 3 vols. (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2015–2016), 3:127–145.
- Bruce E. Benson. "Postmodernism," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*₂ (EDT₂). Ed. Walter A. Elwell. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001. Pp. 939–945 (note bibliography).
- Colin Brown. "Enlightenment, The," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*₂ (EDT₂). Ed. Walter A. Elwell. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001. Pp. 377–380.
- Alan Cairns. "Postmodernism," *Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International, 2002. Pp. 334f.
- Donald A. Carson. *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996.
- Gordon H. Clark. *Language and Theology*. Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1980.
- R. Detweiler. "Postmodernism," *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*. Ed. Alister E. McGrath. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1993. Pp. 456–461.
- Millard J. Erickson. *Evangelical Interpretation: Perspectives on Hermeneutical Issues*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993. Pp. 99–125.
- Millard J. Erickson, Paul K. Helseth, Justin Taylor, eds., *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004.
- Stanley J. Grenz. *A Primer on Postmodernism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996.
- Douglas Groothuis. *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity against the Challenges of Postmodernism*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000.
- Carl F.H. Henry. "Postmodernism: The New Spectre?" in *Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*. Ed. David S.

- Dockery. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1995. Pp. 34–52 (note bibliography at end of book).
- Carl F.H. Henry. “Truth: Dead on Arrival,” *World* (May 20–27 1995). P. 25.
- James Herrick. *The Making of the New Spirituality: The Eclipse of the Western Religious Tradition*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003. Chapters 3–6.
- Peter Jones. *The Other Worldview: Exposing Christianity’s Greatest Threat*. Bellingham, WA: Kirkdale Press, 2015. Pp. 17–28.
- Dennis McCallum, ed. *The Death of Truth: What’s Wrong with Multiculturalism, the Rejection of Reason and the New Postmodern Diversity*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1996.*
- Alister E. McGrath. *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1994. Pp. 235–237, 243–246. The same material is found in Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1994), 96–98, 102–105.
- Alister E. McGrath. *Intellectuals Don’t Need God and Other Myths*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993. Pp. 175–181.
- Vern S. Poythress. *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language—A God-Centered Approach*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009.
- James W. Sire. *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*. 4th ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004. Pp. 211–241.*
- Anthony C. Thiselton. *The Thiselton Companion to Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015. Pp. 685–689.
- Gene E. Veith, Jr. *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994.*
- Christopher Watkin. *Jacques Derrida*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017.

*Excellent general works for beginning research.

Biblical Worldview Resources

by Robert E. Fugate, Ph.D.

The Bible: God's Words to You.

Psycho-Heresy: Christianizing Pagan Psychologies

Key Principles of Biblical Civil Government: Proclaiming the Lordship of Jesus Christ over the Nations.

God's Mandate for Biblical Education.

Toward a Theology of Taxation.

God's Royal Law: Foundation of Moral Order.

A Biblical Philosophy of Truth with Contemporary Applications.

A Theology of Rationality and Logic.

Biblical Curses: Divine and Demonic.

God's Revelation: He Wants You to Know Him.

A Brief History and Critique of Natural Law Theory: Is Natural Law Sufficient to Govern Society?

Biblical Imprecations: Christians' Secret Weapon.

Modernism and Postmodernism: Their History, Beliefs, Cultural Influence—and How to Refute Them.

Some Continuities and Discontinuities between the Older Testament and the Newer Testament.

Jealousy, Hatred, and Wrath: The Disregarded Attributes of God.

Justice and Sovereignty.

What Is the Relationship between Christianity and Culture? — Five Historical Views and Their Consequences

Antinomianism in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: An Illustration of the Consequences of Rejecting God's Law.

Available at LordoftheNations.com

Have You Ever Wondered???

- What is the correlation between modernism and the Enlightenment?
 - What are some examples of Enlightenment thought corrupting Christian doctrine?
 - What are the differences between Biblical theism, modernism, and postmodernism?
 - What is postmodernism and what are its key beliefs?
 - In what ways has postmodernism impacted Western culture and the church?
 - What is the correlation between postmodernism and Emergent churches?
 - What is the Biblical theology of language?
-

About the Author

Robert Fugate, Ph.D., M.Div., has written a variety of teaching materials that have been used by pastors and missionaries in over 60 countries. His book, *The Bible: God's Words to You*, is a complete textbook on the doctrine of Scripture (bibliology). Other books include: *Key Principles of Biblical Civil Government*; *Psycho-Heresy: Christianizing Pagan Psychologies*; and *God's Mandate for Biblical Education*. Robert co-authored the position paper on the Sanctity of Human Life for the International Church Council Project/Coalition on Revival, as well as contributing to their position papers on God's Law and on Christian Education.

In addition to being an author, Robert has pastored for over twenty years. He also mentors pastors, missionary candidates, and young adults in Biblical worldview, presuppositional apologetics, and systematic theology.

Robert and Vonne (his wife of over forty years) are blessed with four godly children (all of whom they home-schooled) and ten grandchildren.