MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF POSTMODERNISM: AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH TO EXPOSITORY PREACHING

by

Steven R. Moses

B.S., Park College, 1988
M.Div., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1991

A THESIS

Submitted to the faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
MASTER OF THEOLOGY
Concentration in Practical Theology
at Trinity International University

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A
Approved for Public Release
Distribution Unlimited

Deerfield, Illinois
May 2003

20040123 056

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the recent film, *The Matrix,* Keanu Reeves meets a man who offers him one of two pills. If he takes the one, his life will continue as it always has, if he takes the other, he will experience a wholly different world and new possibilities. He decides to take the second pill. Soon we see our main character being extracted from a series of tubes and wires in a vast machine filled with other inanimate bodies all connected to a vast array of artificial life support systems. When he awakens he discovers the world is not what he thought it was. His body has been in suspended animation and his thoughts have been fed to him through a machine. None of his experiences in life have been real; all of them have been artificially created in his mind with elaborate measures taken to ensure he never finds out what the world is really all about. He soon finds out that he has been selected to carry out a mission to awaken others and defeat the machines that have enslaved humanity. Welcome to the postmodern world.

We are living in a new world that opens for us new opportunities and along with them new challenges. A new way of viewing truth and reality has begun to transform not only the academic world, but popular culture as well. The word "postmodernism" has found its way into a vast array of disciplines including art, architecture, philosophy, literature, theology and the social sciences. Defining the term "postmodernism" has

presented some challenges of its own. Most writers on the subjected have resorted to providing descriptions rather than definitions. Stanley Grenz wrote,

> *postmodernism* refers to an intellectual mood and an array of cultural expressions that call into question the ideals, principles, and values that lay at the heart of the modern mind-set. *Postmodernity*, in turn, refers to an emerging epoch, the era in which we are living, the time when the postmodern outlook increasingly shapes our society."[1]

There is wide disagreement over the basic contours of postmodernism. Some have accepted this label without contention, while others have tried to downplay its significance and utility for their own thoughts and ideas. We will briefly explore this area of disagreement over the use of terminology. The more important issues for the purposes of this thesis are the actual phenomena that this paradigm shift has produced. As this philosophical shift continues toward greater and greater acceptance of postmodern thinking, preachers will ultimately find that their sermons will have to be adapted to reach this new emerging culture.

In our day, as in every period, there are unique challenges that we face in communicating God's timeless message. Every preacher, pastor or minister has had to carefully examine the culture to determine the best way to make that message comprehensible to his or her generation. The challenges we face today are no more impossible than they were for the Apostle Paul or Jesus. People in every generation have certain barriers to receiving God's Word. Sometimes we face a language barrier. Other times it is a philosophical or cultural barrier, but regardless of the challenge, God's message can be made comprehensible. If we take the time and the effort to go beneath the surface of the challenge, we can find the communication keys that will unlock the hearts and minds of

---

[1] Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 12.

our listeners and allow the Holy Spirit to speak through us in a way that will make God's message plain to the people to whom God has sent us to minister.

This thesis will examine the philosophical shift of postmodernity, along with its challenges and opportunities for ministry.[2] I have intentionally limited the scope of this thesis to the epistemological issues relating to postmodernism and their implications for preaching. Where it is relevant, I will raise some of the social and cultural issues relating to postmodernism, but these will be limited in scope.

The focus of this thesis is in providing an answer to the question, How do we preach to postmoderns in order to bring about transformation in their lives? In order to investigate this question, we will examine a wide variety of sources which describe this current shift of postmodernism and various approaches that have been advocated for meeting this new challenge. In addition, we will examine the various homiletical methods, both past and present, to determine the best model for connecting with postmodern audiences. In arriving at an answer to the research question, we will argue that the truths of Scripture need not be watered down and though preaching to postmoderns requires some contextualization, it is certainly possible to bridge that cultural gap and face squarely the challenge postmodernism poses for preaching in the 21st Century.

---

[2] In this thesis, the word "postmodernity" refers to the cultural change that is currently underway. As the term suggests, it is the cultural change that follows modernity, but we will argue that the culture has not been fully transformed into a postmodern culture. There are elements of both modernity and postmodernity at work in various disciplines and social structures. The word "postmodernism" refers to the philosophical system of thought of postmodernity, the word "postmodernist" refers to the philosophers who espouse postmodernism, and the word "postmoderns" refers to individuals who have come under the influence of postmodern thought.

CHAPTER 2

WHAT IS POSTMODERNISM?

Postmodernism, as described by Stanley Grenz "signifies the quest to move beyond modernism. Specifically, it involves a rejection of the modern mind-set, but launched under the conditions of modernity."[1] This suggests that postmodernism is both a reaction to modernity and involves a cultural shift whose seeds were planted within modernity. The modern mind-set was born in the age of Enlightenment when "the triumph of reason and the mastery of the human mind over the external world" were thought to have delivered modern man from the dark ages.[2] David Harvey points out that,

> Enlightenment thought embraced the idea of progress, and actively sought that break with history and tradition which modernity espouses. It was, above all, a secular movement that sought the demystification and desacralization of knowledge and social organization in order to liberate human beings from their chains.[3]

As this comment suggests, the "premodern" period was often characterized by mystical and sacred explanations for reality. The Enlightenment project sought to shift culture from what was considered archaic and inaccurate understandings of reality in the "premodern" period to

---

[1] Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 2.

[2] Paul Lakeland, *Postmodernity: Christian Identity in a Fragmented Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 13.

[3] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1989), 12-13.

a modern age of Enlightenment. In a similar shift, postmodernism is an attempt to move beyond modernism.

There is some disagreement among scholars as to whether the term "postmodernism" is an accurate term for the phenomena we are witnessing in contemporary culture. David Lyon suggests the term "postmodern" first came into popular usage after Jean-Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition.*[4] From that time, the term has met with varying degrees of support and rejection even among those who first began to write about the phenomena. Lyon points out that since the 1980s and "despite the fact that several of these discarded, denied or distanced themselves" from it, the term "postmodern" came to be linked to their name.[5] Among those most closely linked to the term, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Richard Rorty and Jean-Francois Lyotard, represent some of the most prominent thinkers and writers on postmodernism. In addition to these, a number of prominent theologians, philosophers and writers have used the term in their descriptions of the cultural shift. Among them are Millard Erickson, Stanley Grenz, David Harvey, Alvin Plantinga and Paul Lakeland. However, in spite of the fact that postmodernists have accepted the term and many theologians and authors have used the term in their descriptions of current cultural phenomena, there are a number of prominent thinkers and writers who are unwilling to accept "postmodernism" as a descriptive term for the cultural shift we are witnessing. Harold Netland, among others uses the terminology of "postmodernism" for the sake of

---

[4]David Lyon, *Postmodernity*, 2d ed. Concepts in Social Thought (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 16.

[5]Ibid.

argument, but he is unwilling to adopt its use for the conditions now prevalent in our culture. He points out that,

> Since the 1970s, the term postmodern has been used of a variety of literary, philosophical, social and political trends linked by their critique of established 'modern' values, assumptions and institutions. Postmodernity in this sense refers to a broad range of late- twentieth-century intellectual and cultural movements in the fine arts, architecture, communications media, politics, the social sciences, literary theory and hermeneutics, and philosophy that perhaps are more connected by what they reject than by what they affirm."[6]

He argues that this paradigm which understands postmodernity as a repudiation of modernity and the Enlightenment project is reductionistic.[7] He wrote that "identifying modernity with the Enlightenment tends to minimize other intellectual and social movements of the time, thereby granting it more influence than it deserves."[8] Instead he suggests we label this cultural shift, "the culture of modernity" and see it as the ongoing process of modernization and globalization. The changes in our culture that have come about as a result of modernization and globalization are far more profound than many people have realized. Technological improvements have enabled us to travel all over the world, making the world seem smaller and creating a climate in which the lines between the global world and local communities have blurred more than ever before. The changes that have resulted from worldwide communication through television and the Internet have also brought together diverse cultures from every corner of the globe. It should be noted that globalization is not

---

[6]Harold Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith & Mission* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2001), 59.

[7]Ibid., 74.

[8]Ibid.

just a Western phenomenon. The cultures of the Eastern world are interacting with the cultures of the Western world, so that both are experiencing the influences of each other moving in both directions simultaneously.[9] Netland is not alone in contending that the word postmodernity inaccurately portrays the phenomena we are witnessing. Thomas Oden takes a similar view and argues that the culture shift we are experiencing should be categorized as "ultramodernity" rather than postmodernity.[10] While I agree with Netland that the impact of modernization and globalization have pushed the boundaries of modernity, I would argue that the current cultural shift is moving away from some key ideals of modernity while employing the forces of modern cultural change to bring about a new social and cultural paradigm. I also agree that it is reductionistic to suggest that postmodernity is now the prevailing view of our entire culture or that it is a complete repudiation of modernity. This shift toward postmodernity is much more gradual. I would argue that our global culture is experiencing a culture shift which repudiates some aspects of modernity, while retaining and even extending other aspects of modernity to new levels. In spite of these areas of disagreement, I will be using the term "postmodernism" to describe the current philosophical and cultural shift. Since many of the proponents of this cultural shift have adopted the use of

---

[9] Ibid., 85-89.

[10] Thomas C. Oden, *After Modernity . . . What? Agenda for Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 11. In the preface to this new edition, Oden points out that deconstructionists have adopted the term "ultramodern" instead of postmodern for their work in language. A number of other authors have made similar arguments suggesting that "postmodernism" is an inaccurate portrayal of the current phenomena. At the other end of the spectrum, there are authors who take the exact opposite view. Gene Veith adamantly states that "the modern period is over" and postmodernism as arrived. Gene Edward Veith, Jr. *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1994), 19.

the term and assuming the data demonstrates a degree of repudiation of modernity, I believe we are warranted in the use of this term to describe the phenomena.

In order to avoid reductionism, I do think it is helpful to point out the "kind of modernism" that postmodernists are reacting to when they suggest that we move beyond modernism. David Harvey has pointed out that the epistemological assumptions of the Enlightenment project are at the heart of kind of modernism that postmodernists reject. He wrote,

> The Enlightenment, for example, took it as axiomatic that there was only one possible answer to any question. From this it followed that the world could be controlled and rationally ordered if we could only picture and represent it rightly. But this presumed that there existed a single correct mode of representation which, if we could uncover it (and this was what scientific and mathematical endeavors were all about), would provide the means to Enlightenment ends.[11]

Grenz concurs with this analysis and points out that foundational to the Enlightenment project was the assumption that "knowledge is certain, objective and good."[12] These particular assumptions of the Enlightenment have been repudiated by postmodernists. Enlightenment thinkers argued that certainty in knowledge can be achieved through human reason alone and objectivity can be achieved by observing the world as "unconditioned observers."[13] In addition, Enlightenment thinkers developed the idea that knowledge is inherently good. They were optimistic in their assumptions. Grenz has noted that this led them to the belief that "progress is inevitable, that science, coupled with the power of

---

[11] Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 27.

[12] Grenz, *Primer on Postmodernism*, 4.

[13] Ibid.

education, will eventually free us from our vulnerability to nature, as well as from all social bondage."[14] Postmodernists reject these epistemological assumptions of the Enlightenment, but as we have pointed out, they have retained certain aspects of modernity so that both postmodernity and modernity have a continuing influence on our contemporary culture.

For the purposes of this thesis, we will limit our discussion to the epistemological issues relating to postmodernism. The scope of issues that could be covered under the label postmodernism is vast indeed, but since our major concern is the development of a model for preaching to those who have been influenced by postmodern thought, the epistemological issues should provide a framework for understanding postmodern thought as it relates primarily to the context of preaching in a postmodern world. In this chapter, we will trace the historical and philosophical development of postmodern epistemology and conclude the chapter with a critique of postmodern epistemology.

Historical and Philosophical Development of Postmodernism

In order to fully understand how this cultural shift has taken place, we will begin by describing that period referred to as the modern age. Christian scholar Thomas Oden maintains that the modern age lasted precisely 200 years, "from the fall of the Bastille in 1789 to the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989."[15] Other scholars argue for an earlier date for the beginning of the modern period, going back to Rene Descartes in 1641 when he

---

[14] Ibid.

[15] Thomas C. Oden, *Two Worlds: Notes on the Death of Modernity in America and Russia* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 32. Though Oden uses the term "ultramodernity" rather than "postmodernity," he does argue that a definite cultural shift began at the end of modernity.

promulgated the famous statement, *cogito ergo sum,* "I think, therefore I am." [16] This statement heralded the beginning of a whole new movement in philosophy. Rationalism burst onto the scene and gave epistemology a new framework for answering the questions, "What can be known?" and "How can we know that we know anything?" Descartes' rationalism sought epistemological answers through doubting everything. He resolved as a first principle "never to accept anything for true which he did not clearly know to be such."[17] Cartesian doubt and the Rationalism that it spawned, opened the door for the scientific method and suggested a whole new way of explaining all of reality.

This period that began with Rationalism is commonly referred to as The Enlightenment Period. The Enlightenment was in part a reaction to the premodern preoccupation with superstition, supernatural speculation, and revelation. These new insights supported the view that reality could be explained in ways that excluded the necessity for believing in a supernatural Being in control of reality. For science, it was a grand new day. However, for religion, rationalism was threatening to explain away any need for God at all.[18]

The rationalism of Descartes opened the door for scientific investigation and the whole array of scientific inquiry gave a new sense of hope to a world that had been locked into a worldview that explained reality with premodern superstitions and supernatural

---

[16] Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 24.

[17] Colin Brown, *Philosophy & the Christian Faith* (London: Tyndale Press, 1968), 50.

[18] It should be noted that Rene Descartes had no intention of promoting a philosophical system that excluded God from the equation. In fact, Descartes reasoned from his own existence that a God must exist. Brown, *Philosophy & the Christian Faith*, 51.

speculation. Some were even heralding that science had replaced religion as a source of absolute truth. Keith Johnston wrote, "People no longer needed to cling to superstitions or even Biblical revelation because now, through empirical study and scientific rationalism, one could conclusively determine what was true and real."[19]

Descartes promulgated his philosophy in the 1600s, but a new epistemological system, Empiricism, emerged in the eighteenth century. The Empiricists, including John Locke (1632-1704), George Berkeley (1685-1753) and David Hume (1711-1766) were not content to reason strictly on the basis of so-called self-evident truths; instead they sought answers to the problem of knowledge through experience, especially the senses. Though David Hume is included among the Empiricists, he is best known as a skeptic. In his brand of empiricism, he doubted that anything can be known for sure. In fact, he advanced the idea that one cannot prove the existence of anything outside oneself or even the existence of oneself.[20]

This movement through the history of philosophy from Rationalism, through Empiricism to modern Skepticism demonstrates the pathway that postmodernism has taken to bring us where we are today. Rationalism replaced revelation by suggesting that reason is on a higher order of knowing than accepting what to some may have seemed like superstition. Rationalism purported that reason alone is sufficient to discover truth, while

---

[19] Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 25.

[20] Brown, *Philosophy & the Christian Faith*, 68.

Empiricism held that all knowledge proceeds from sense perception.[21] Modern skepticism is not so much a philosophical period, as it is a method for doing epistemology.[22] Polluck and Cruz point out that, "Historically, philosophers have often motivated the simple epistemic tasks with the help of skeptical arguments."[23] Even Descartes, began his reasoning by doubting. Much of what philosophers have done in the past has been motivated in some way to answer the skeptic. Postmodernism appears to have drawn much of its thinking from the wells of skepticism that have been dug in each period of philosophical development.[24]

The Enlightenment project brought new hope for many, seeing progress as inevitable and a bright future brought about through technological development. To Enlightenment thinkers, science became supreme and they believed that everything could be explained scientifically. In reaction to the premodern concepts of the gods and demons intervening and confusing our lives, they argued that science provided answers to phenomena previously explained only by superstition.

Living along side these hopeful people were a group dissatisfied with the mechanistic view of reality. Romanticism emerged countering the Enlightenment assumption that reason is the most important faculty, with the assumption that emotion is at

---

[21] Louis P. Pojman, *What Can We Know? An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomas Learning, 2001), 16.

[22] I am using the term "modern" skepticism to differentiate it from ancient skepticism that goes back at least as far as Socrates who frequently began an inquiry, "We ought to investigate this." The Greek word means "to inquire or investigate." Pojman, *What Can We Know?* 27.

[23] John L. Polluck and Joseph Cruz, *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge* (Landham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 2.

[24] In postmodernism, "skepticism" has been replaced with "suspicion."

the heart of our essence of humanness.[25] Romantics urged that we get in touch with our inner selves, that our lives only have meaning in the inner world of our emotions. They criticized civilization as a force that enslaves. They gloried in the past and sought to bring humanity back to nature away from all the technology and materialism.

Their view of nature in harmony however, was completely and utterly refuted by Darwin's theory of evolution. Darwin set out to prove that nature is actually violent and argued that species survived and adapted through what he called "the survival of the fittest." Romanticism was never able to prevail and finally disappeared in the latter nineteenth century "before the hard-edged certainties of neo-Enlightenment materialism"[26]

The materialism that emerged did not provide the kind of hope and satisfaction that people craved. In response, Existentialism emerged as a new world view that offered meaning to individuals even in light of the assertions of materialism.[27] This new worldview, although accepting that there is no inherent meaning in life, asserted that we can make life meaningful by making choices. Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), argued that "what matters is the subjective choice, the leap of faith, one's commitment to the absurd."[28] Veith

---

[25] Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Culture* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1994), 35-36.

[26] Ibid., 37.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Brown, *Philosophy & the Christian Faith*, 129.

asserts that "romanticism and existentialism paved the way for today's postmodern worldview."[29]

We should not stop there however, because Existentialism makes little sense without understanding something about the major shift that occurred through Kant and Hegel. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) represents the "climax of eighteenth-century rationalism and empiricism." Kant asserted that "the mind does not actually perceive things as they are in themselves." We see things as they appear to our senses, but we cannot know the thing in its essence.[30] In other words, there is a great divide between what we perceive, the "phenomenal" and the object that we are actually perceiving, the "noumenal." Kant was trying to formulate a way of countering the skepticism of Hume, but what he did in fact was create even greater difficulties for everyone who followed after him.[31]

The optimism of the Enlightenment period was all but gone by the time Kant finished. During the golden period of the Enlightenment, there was a sense that we had finally come to the place where we can say that we know something for sure. There was a future goal of finding a sort of unified field theory for philosophy, some circle within which we can categorize all that we know. This goal was also shaping science. Physicists were searching for the unified field theory that would unite electricity, magnetism, gravity and every other "field" occurring in nature. Philosophers wanted the same thing, but Kant

---

[29] Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 35.

[30] Brown, *Philosophy & the Christian Faith*, 91.

[31] Ibid., 96.

spoiled their hopes and dreams by creating this huge gap between what is perceived and what can be known for sure.

Hegel (1770-1831) attempted to bridge the gap with his concept of "synthesis."[32] What Hegel formulated, borrowing from Kant's ideas was a revolutionary concept. Instead of beginning with antithesis or Cartesian doubt, he asserted, "let us think in terms of thesis—antithesis, with the answer always being synthesis."[33] In other words, the truth resides somewhere in the middle. What does that imply for our pursuit of knowledge? It suggests that all truth is relative. Instead of living with concepts like "either this or that," this hypothesis suggests we look for ways to say, "Both this and that." It sounds very tolerant and probably even has that sparkle of modernity, but it presents huge problems for Christianity as we shall see later.

Schaeffer calls this period in philosophical development "the line of despair."[34] By using the word "despair" he is not suggesting that there is no hope for the philosopher or for humanity, but there is a sense of despair over ever being able to bridge Kant's phenomenal-noumenal gap. There is despair that we may never be sure that we can know anything. In short, we may never be sure that we have gone beneath scratching the surface. Up to this point, philosophers were optimistic, but after Kant and then Hegel, there is now a move to try and pick up the pieces and try to move on. Kierkegaard tries to help the

---

[32] Francis A. Schaeffer, *Escape from Reason,* in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer,* vol. 1, *A Christian View of Philosophy and Culture* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1982), 233.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid, 237.

project by giving us the chance to bridge Kant's noumenal and phenomenal gap by a leap of faith. We can have an experience that will validate our existence and give us some meaning to life. But with the synthesis of Hegel still lying on the surface of the philosophical landscape, it is argued, that all we can hope for is some sort of relative truth. Even after Kierkegaard's attempt to leap the "broad, ugly ditch," philosophers were concluding that nothing can be known for sure.

That brings us to the postmodern period where the culture has begun the shift toward denial of objective reality and the rejection of any possibility for absolute truth. Alvin Plantinga summarizes postmodernist repudiation of modernism by noting that they have rejected classical foundationalism, the correspondence theory of truth, a representational theory of language, objectivity of thought and belief, and inclusive theories of reality or "metanarratives."[35] These "modern" views postmodernists reject are representative of the various intervals of optimism toward the pursuit of truth and objectivity in the modern period. The optimism of the modern period was shattered by the nihilistic attacks of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) in the late nineteenth century, though the final blows would not be felt until the 1970s.[36] Stanley Grenz wrote, "The immediate impulse for

---

[35] Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 422-423. c.f. Millard J. Erickson, *The Postmodern World: Discerning the Times and the Spirit of our Age* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2002), 117.

[36] In an essay, Friedrich Nietzsche wrote, "What is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymns, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer coins." Friedrich Nietzsche, "Truth and the Extra-moral Sense," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kauffmann (New York: Viking, 1968), 46-47.

dismantling of the Enlightenment project came from the rise of deconstruction as a literary theory, which influenced a new movement in philosophy."[37] Jacques Derrida is credited with being the "father of modern deconstruction." Though he is primarily a philosopher, he has also had a major impact on the field of literary criticism.[38]

Deconstruction, as a movement arose in response to the "Structualist" theory of interpreting literary texts. This theory suggested that cultures developed literature for the purpose of giving meaning to their existence, to make sense out of the meaninglessness of reality. The structuralists posited that all cultures utilize a common structure and by analyzing this structure and reading the texts with this understanding, we can make sense out of our experience of reality.[39] "Post-structuralists," who later adopted the title "Deconstructionists," rejected this view and argued that no such structure exists. All literature, according to their view, is dependent on the perspective of the reader. Meaning is derived from the text by entering into dialogue with the text. Consequently, there are as many readings of a text as there are readers. Deconstruction has given postmodernists a tool for the advancement of their total rejection of the concept of objective truth.

Michel Foucault, another major proponent of deconstructionism has taken deconstruction to another level by arguing that interpretations of truth are based on power.

---

[37] Stanley J. Grenz, "Star Trek and the Next Generation: Postmodernity and the Future of Evangelical Theology," in *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1995), 78.

[38] Millard Erickson, *Truth or Consequences: The Promise and Perils of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 113.

[39] Grenz, "Star Trek," 78.

He suggests that at the root of every text or history, there is someone who is advancing their position in order to oppress or subjugate those who are not in power.[40] Veith argues that "Postmodern existentialism goes back to Nietzsche to emphasize not only will, but power. Liberation comes from rebelling against existing power structures, including oppressive notions of 'knowledge' and 'truth.'"[41] Foucault's position indicts every historian and writer with the charge of bias and that bias is not only in order to further a cause, but ultimately to do violence to some oppressed group or culture. He claims that "every assertion of knowledge is an act of power."[42] Foucault and other deconstructionists utilize what they call a "hermeneutic of suspicion."[43] This means that as they interpret a text, they approach it with the suspicion that there may be a hidden agenda lurking somewhere in the background. Michel Foucault has argued that "the concept of liberty is an invention of the ruling classes."[44] Taking his lead from Nietzsche, he suggests that the citizens think they are free, but are in fact being efficiently controlled by the ruling class. This is an example of how postmodernists employ the "hermeneutic of suspicion" in their examination of culture and truth to determine the power structures that underlie various assumptions.

---

[40] Millard J. Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith: Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 86.

[41] Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 48.

[42] Grenz, "Star Trek," 79.

[43] Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 54.

[44] Michel Foucault, "Nietzche, Genealogy, History," in *Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 78-79.

Foucault's ideas have made it into the mainstream. Consider the plight of Christopher Columbus under the knife of deconstruction. It is currently in vogue to vilify Christopher Columbus and other American heroes for their use of power to oppress marginalized people groups. Certain elements of history are currently being rewritten as marginalized groups cry out for justice. New histories will feature feminist, gay or "Afro-centric" slants in order give each group a chance to be heard.[45] Historical revision is alive and well. Perhaps George Orwell was something of a prophet when he wrote *1984* and introduced us to those strange new ideas such as "newspeak" and "doublethink." The Party line in *1984* ran, "Who controls the past, controls the future: who controls the present controls the past."[46] As far back as 1948, Orwell's classic work correctly predicted the direction of philosophical thought. His "newspeak" is just a derivation of our modern "political correctness." According to this view, since words have the power to oppress, they must be kept under tight wraps so as not to offend.

In the same way that history has been deconstructed, all of language has come under the deconstructionist scalpel. Postmodernists argue that we are trapped in a world where no meaning is possible because we are in a "prison house of language."[47] This "prison" is a metaphor for their view that words have hidden trace meanings in them that communicate their opposite in order to oppress or exclude marginalized groups. For example, they point out that the word "man" is the opposite of "woman" and "freedom" is

---

[45] Veith, *Postmodern Times,* 50.

[46] George Orwell, *1984* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1949), 32.

[47] Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 53.

the opposite of "slavery." According to this view, our use of the word "man" excludes and oppresses women. The words we use contain the "trace" of the group we are trying to marginalize.[48] Postmodernists support their argument by noting that a free society would not need a word for freedom if there were no such thing as slavery.[49]

Deconstructionism may have begun as a literary theory, but it has become a very sophisticated method of interpreting everything. Veith argues, "As it corrodes the very concept of absolute truth, deconstruction provides the intellectual grounding for the popular relativism running rampant in postmodern society."[50] George Barna's polling data suggests support for this rampant departure from absolutes. In a survey conducted in 1991, Barna reports that 66 percent of Americans responded affirmatively to the statement, "There is no such thing as absolute truth." When the survey was broken down by age, 72 percent of eighteen to twenty-five year olds held that view.[51] In the same study, a shocking 53 percent of the Evangelicals surveyed also held that there is no absolute truth. Interestingly enough, 88 percent of them believed in the infallibility of the Word of God.[52] One could argue that perhaps they didn't understand the question or perhaps the polling data represented such a poor sampling that we don't have results that we can trust. Either of these may explain this

---

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid. It is an interesting argument, but the data could equally support the assertion that human minds tend to organize thought with contrasts in mind, not necessarily to oppress, but merely to understand.

[50] Ibid., 56.

[51] George Barna, *The Barna Report: What Americans Believe* (Ventura, Cal.: Regal Books, 1991), 83-85.

[52] Ibid., 292-294.

phenomenon, but another explanation may be that postmodernism has in fact gained ground even in our churches.

Utilizing this tool of deconstruction, postmodernists have advanced new theories of truth. Jacques Derrida claims that meaning is not simply "out there" ready to be discovered. All that remains is the perspective of the interpreter.[53] Postmodernists renounce all claims to acquiring the truth objectively. For them, there is no absolute truth. They interpret truth relatively as "social constructs" and Foucault at least suggests the hidden motive of power behind all expressions of truth.

Philosopher Richard Rorty has abandoned the modern concept of truth, often referred to as the "correspondence theory of truth." During the Enlightenment, truth was said to correspond with reality either by corresponding with innate ideas or sense data. The very idea that truth could be so easily determined is anathema to Rorty. He suggested that we just abandon the pursuit of "systematic philosophy" and replace it with "edifying philosophy" which keeps up the dialogue but ignores the search for truth.[54] Instead of a correspondence theory of truth, Rorty has defined truth as "what our peers will let us get away with saying."[55] In other words, truth does not correspond or even cohere with reality. It only requires agreement from our peers. Rorty, who considers himself a Pragmatist, has also adopted a pragmatic view of truth suggesting that truth is "what it is better for us to

---

[53] Erickson, *The Postmodern World*, 81.

[54] Grenz, "Star Trek," 79.

[55] Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), 176.

believe."[56] Once again, he has abandoned modern conceptions of truth which required epistemic justification on more objective grounds.

Grenz writes that "The postmodern worldview operates with a community-based understanding of truth."[57] He goes on to say that this worldview "extends beyond our perceptions of truth to its essence: there is no absolute truth; rather truth is relative to the community in which we participate."[58] This suggests that postmodernists, particularly those who adopt the practice of deconstruction, believe that truth is "socially constructed." If all truth is "socially constructed," then how can the meaning or the correct interpretation ever be derived? How can we ever know what a given text means? Stanley Fish, a postmodern literary professor and literary critic, suggests the answer lies in the community. He wrote, "Communication does not take place in a vacuum, but in the context of the institutional community."[59] He argues that the meaning is not embedded in the text, but is derived in the context of the interpretive community.[60] In other words, even those who share the native language with the author cannot predict the precise meaning of a given text without having experienced the same context as the original author. For Fish and other postmodernists, the search for authorial intent is a useless enterprise. Instead, they advocate searching for meaning only within the interpretive community.

---

[56] Ibid., 10.

[57] Grenz, *Primer on Postmodernism*, 8.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Erickson, *The Postmodern World*, 52.

[60] Ibid.

In addition to their alternative views of truth, postmodernists have advanced an alternative view of logic. During the Enlightenment, it would have been unthinkable to assert that two opposing views could both be true. Aristotle developed the systematic principles of logic that most of the western world has subscribed to for centuries. In deductive logic, Aristotle developed three principles: the law of identity, the law of non-contradiction and the law of the excluded middle. The law of identity states simply that: A is A. For example, a table is a table. The law of non-contradiction states that something cannot be both A and not-A at the same time. So a table cannot be a table and also not a table. The law of excluded middle says that something is either A or not-A, it can't be both a table and not a table. Derrida and others have challenged this view of logic.[61] They are more than willing to accept contradiction. They even seem to celebrate contradictory logic as if it in some way frees them from the restraints of modernity.

Why do they take this position? It seems in part to reflect their total system of thought. They believe that truth is socially and culturally constructed. As the argument goes, since there are no absolute truths, you can have your truth and I can have mine. Veith points out that "Existentialism provides the rationale for contemporary relativism. Since everyone creates his or her own meaning, every meaning is equally valid," no matter how contradictory they may be.[62] The common refrain is "what's true for you may not be true for me."[63]

---

[61] Ibid., 55.

[62] Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 38.

[63] Ibid.

Jean-Francois Lyotard, one of the earliest defenders and commentators on postmodernism, defined the movement in terms of their total rejection of "metanarratives."[64] Harvey defines "metanarratives" as "large-scale theoretical interpretations purportedly of universal application."[65] They are "grand stories" that seek to explain reality in such a way that many individual ideas fit together in a comprehensive whole. In the modern period, these metanarratives represented a view that history is unfolding in certain kinds of patterns that shape our understanding of the whole world. Christianity had its redemptive history in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ as applicable to the whole world. Marx, borrowing from the Hegelian Dialectic, described all of history as a succession of economic revolutions.[66] The problem with metanarratives, argue postmodernists is that they assume too much. They describe the world in such a way that all other parts of the world must subscribe to their way of thinking. Postmodernists reject the "positivistic, technocentric, and rationalistic, universal modernism . . . identified with the belief in linear progress, absolute truths, the rational planning of social orders, and the standardization of knowledge and production."[67] Postmodernists prefer instead "heterogeneity and difference as liberative

---

[64]Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiii-xxv.

[65]Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, 9.

[66]Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith*, 110.

[67]Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, 9.

forces in the redefinition of cultural discourse."[68] Terry Eagleton summarizes well the attitude of postmodernists toward metanarratives:

> Post-modernism signals the death of such "metanarratives" whose secretly terroristic function was to ground and legitimate the illusion of "universal" human history. We are now in the process of wakening from the nightmare of modernity, with its manipulative reason and fetish of totality, into the laid-back pluralism of the post-modern, that heterogeneous range of lifestyles and language games which has renounced the nostalgic urge to totalize and legitimate itself . . . . Science and philosophy must jettison their grandiose metaphysical claims and view themselves more modestly as just another set of narratives.[69]

Although the issues we have discussed only represent a fraction of the ideas that could be considered under the title "postmodern epistemology," these particular concepts are fairly representative of the key positions taken by postmodernists. In the next section, I will provide a critique of postmodern epistemology from a philosophical perspective.

Critique of Postmodern Epistemology

It is possible, from the assertions we have made regarding postmodernism, to see postmodernism as wholly unregenerate and devoid of any redeeming quality. On the other hand, there are some positive elements in postmodernism that may in fact provide a basis for dialogue with Christianity. As I have spent an extended amount of time describing various claims of postmodernists that may be interpreted negatively, let me begin my criticism of postmodern thought by examining some of these points of agreement.

---

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

First, postmodernists may be commended for their sympathetic attitude toward the oppressed and marginalized of our culture. We may affirm with them that truth has sometimes been used as a barb to attack those less fortunate or oppress minority groups who have no voice. There are even elements of deconstruction which have proved helpful in discerning ways that history has been written to uphold the powerful and suppress the weak. Deconstructionists are right when they say that we are wrong to suggest simply that "Columbus discovered America" as most of us were taught in school. The truth is there were already people on the Americas before Columbus ever arrived. We might rephrase the statement and say that "Columbus discovered that an American Continent exists where Europeans had no prior knowledge of such a place." That is certainly more accurate. If the goal of deconstruction is to find other such misstatements and provide needed correction, then we can affirm them in that quest for more accurate statements about history.

Michael Foucault's emphasis on the use of "power" to establish truth has both warrant and bears affirmation. He is correct in asserting that those who are in power are often guilty of manipulating the truth to suit their own ends.[70] Millard Erickson illustrates this point by saying that "a joke is told of a dual track meet between the United States and the Soviet Union several years ago, won by the United States. *Pravda*, however, reported, 'U.S.S.R. places second in track meet; U.S.A. finishes next to last."[71] Perhaps a more recent phenomenon of this practice can be found in the "spin doctoring" that goes on in political

---

[70]Erickson, *The Postmodern World*, 93.

[71]Ibid., 96.

campaigns. Foucault's emphasis on the power/knowledge connection should remind us to be careful and tentative when any public assertion is made by those who are currently in power.

We can also affirm postmodernists in their practice of employing a "hermeneutic of suspicion" when reading a text. To read anything of substance without critical reflection is tantamount to intellectual slothfulness. We should employ a certain degree of intellectual curiosity when we read anything of any significance. Certainly if we are reading a novel, we are less likely to care whether what is being said is accurate and truthful, but to read non-fiction works with the same attitude is foolhardy and irresponsible. It is also true, as postmodernists have pointed out, that our knowledge is conditioned by our point of view. We all have paradigms, ways of viewing reality, that are often shaped by our upbringing and the culture in which we have been raised. Our experiences in life do indeed affect our judgments and our attitudes. Millard Erickson has pointed out that our society barely even discussed the origins of man, apart from creation until Darwin published *Origin of Species.* Soon after, the subject became a matter of heated debate throughout our culture.[72] What this means is that we must take into consideration our presuppositions and carefully evaluate the positions we hold with an understanding that what we hold to be absolutely true may in fact be "tinted" by the color of the lenses through which we view reality.

Postmodernists also can be affirmed for their celebration of diversity and disdain for prejudice. Christians in particular should be the greatest champions of this

---

[72]Ibid., 89.

enterprise. Postmodernists along with others have leveled complaints against Christianity for oppression of marginalized groups and those complaints are not without warrant. The crusades are often brought up as examples of the abuse of Christianity. Christian missionary enterprises have been at least somewhat culpable in various colonial injustices. When in the name of colonization, nations have stripped the raw materials of their colonies and enslaved the indigenous peoples, attempting at the same time to evangelize them, Christianity comes out looking more like an oppressive power than a religion of freedom and love. To that charge, we can readily agree with postmodernists that we have been guilty of ethnocentrism and prejudice.

We can even affirm with postmodernists that we are guilty of arbitrarily ascribing right and wrong to certain acts based strictly on our own self-interests rather than truly discerning an absolute right or absolute wrong based on objective criteria. For example, most of us would agree that it is wrong to oppress the poor, but our "arcane machinery by which we finance public education" based on property tax has produced as Jonathan Kozol has written "savage inequalities" in our American educational system.[73] No self-respecting Christian can affirm that we have the corner on the market of truth when it comes to right and wrong; though we say we know right from wrong, we don't always practice what we preach. To that charge of postmodernism, we can readily admit that we have something to learn about morality. The very people who are most apt to bristle at moral relativism are often guilty of practicing moral relativism when it suits their own self-interests.

---

[73] Jonathan Kozol, *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), 54.

Therefore, I have argued that not every claim of postmodernism is without warrant and there is much that we can learn from them. Many of their attacks against modernity are points of agreement with Christianity and come as welcome relief after years of embattling apologetics. For example, Christians and postmodernists agree that science does not have all the answers. Human beings are more than just "smart" animals who are evolutionarily more highly developed, but basically part of a mechanistic universe. Christians and postmodernists agree that humans are not just material objects in a cosmic mechanistic universe. We reject that metanarrative, but affirm a grander metanarrative that understands God as the Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer of creation with human beings holding a place of high stature and importance in God's eyes. Christians and postmodernists agree that progress has its faults. Science gave us "E=mc2" and then developed nuclear weapons that have killed thousands. That is a form of progress we could have all done without. Christians and postmodernists agree that there are some things we cannot know based on perception alone. Christians would place knowing God in this category, postmodernists would not affirm that God exists necessarily, but certainly their allowance for non-perceptual beliefs leaves room for this assertion. Christians and postmodernists can agree that reason alone is insufficient for discerning truth. While postmodernists reject objective truth and Christians affirm revelation, both find reason insufficient alone and to this we can agree.

So there are some points of agreement that Christianity and postmodernism share and not every premise of postmodernism is without warrant, but there are serious areas

of disagreement. The question is: do we have sufficient grounds to criticize the philosophical position of postmodernists?

Let us begin with their rejection of objective truth. Their basis for rejecting objective truth takes as its starting point the rejection of classical foundationalism. It should be noted that, the rejection of classical foundationalism and attempts to find a more accurate form of epistemic justification is one of the most important issues in contemporary philosophy.[74] The issue at stake is, "What are we justified in believing?" Postmodernists are not alone in their rejection of classical foundationalism; many contemporary philosophers have also rejected it. However, they have not taken the next step and rejected all objective truth. In other words, I think the postmodern rejection of classical foundationalism is warranted. It does indeed contain fatal errors.[75] However, for postmodernists to reject all forms of epistemic justification is totally unwarranted. Alvin Plantinga has written,

> Postmodernists nearly all reject classical foundationalism; in this they concur with most Christian thinkers and most contemporary philosophers. Momentously enough, however, many postmodernists apparently believe that the demise of classical foundationalism implies something far more startling: that there is no such thing as truth at all, no way things really are.[76]

Plantinga's work in *Warranted Christian Belief* provides a strong defense of Christianity against all comers and in his conclusion to the chapter regarding the possible defeater that

---

[74] Pojman, *What Can We Know?* xiii.

[75] A number of philosophers have noted these fatal errors. E.g. Classical Foundationalism states that "a belief is justified if it self-evident, incorrigible or evident to the senses." That statement itself fails to meet its own test. In addition, since Foundationalism relies on "basic beliefs" upon which other "non-basic" beliefs rely, there appears to be an insufficient quantity of basic beliefs to support all other beliefs.

[76] Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 436.

postmodernism represents, he concludes that "postmodernism is a kind of failure of epistemic nerve."[77]

Earlier we affirmed some of the tenets of postmodernism, such as their practice of deconstruction, especially regarding the use of power to oppress those at the margins of society. As we have said, the fact that those in power sometimes suppress the marginalized should make us cautious; however, postmodern deconstruction more often than not goes too far. If every text, history, and statement must be deconstructed, then what is to prevent deconstruction from being deconstructed? In fact, deconstruction itself is left wide open for criticism on the merits of its own methodology.[78] Derrida has reserved Justice as the one area that is exempt from deconstruction. He argues that, "Justice is not deconstructible. After all, not everything is deconstructible, or there would be no point to deconstruction."[79] Of course, this seems arbitrary. Why is justice exempt? This seems to make deconstruction itself self-referentially defeated on two counts: first, deconstruction as a methodology could not survive its own deconstruction and second, the exemption Derrida has suggested for justice seems to be another example of the use of power to assert truth. In other words, Derrida's tool is supposed to cut away power biases, but he reserves the right or the "power" to exempt certain components from deconstruction, namely justice and deconstruction itself. This seems to me to be a fatal error.

---

[77] Ibid., 437.

[78] Erickson, *The Postmodern World*, 97.

[79] Jacques Derrida, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, ed. John D. Caputo (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 131-132.

Postmodernists also reject a "correspondence theory of truth," and representationalism an important corollary of epistemic justification. Correspondence theory is the belief that truth corresponds with reality and representationalism is the view the truth represents reality. If what we believe about reality has no foundations or cannot be epistemically justified, then truth is called into question as well. Richard Rorty, has defined truth as "what our peers will let us get away with saying."[80] His definition of truth has a fatal flaw. Since he has rejected objectivity and a correspondence view of truth, he has left himself an easy prey for his peers. Louis Pojman, has stated that, as one of his peers, "I won't let him get away with saying that."[81] By his own definition of truth, he has in fact painted himself into a corner, so that his definition of truth itself is false. If for him truth is "what our peers will let us get away with saying" and his peers won't let him get away with that definition, then his view of truth fails.

Rorty's other definition of truth also has significant problems. He has said that truth is "what it is better for us to believe."[82] This, of course, betrays his pragmatism. Taken to its extreme, this view of truth ultimately leads to radical pluralism and relativism. If truth is what is better for me to believe, then what is to keep me from creating truth to suit my own self interests? Alvin Plantinga has made a similar argument against this view of truth. He offers three examples of how this view of truth distorts reality and ultimately leads to erroneous ways of thinking. Take AIDS for example. Suppose I decide to assert that there

---

[80] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 176.

[81] Pojman, *What Can We Know?* 10.

[82] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 10.

is so such thing as the disease AIDS, and suppose my colleagues will "let me get away with saying that" and "it seems better to believe" this way. According to Rorty, then AIDS no longer exists. Most would recognize the absurdity of his view. Plantinga's second example points out that in the Tiananmen Square debacle, the Chinese authorities denied the students were murdered. According to Rorty's view, if the other authorities would be willing to let them get away with saying it had never occurred, then the truth would have therefore changed and the incident would never have occurred. Finally, take the Holocaust. There are today, some neo-Nazi skinhead groups who deny the Holocaust ever occurred. They assert that Hitler and his cronies were all compassionate kind hearted men who never harmed a single person. According to Rorty's view, if these skinheads' peers will let them get away with saying that the Holocaust never occurred, then the truth changes; and the Holocaust never occurred.[83]

This postmodern view of truth is sometimes cast as "socially constructed" truth.[84] The idea is that truth is created within a community or social group and that community's truth is true for them. While an outsider may criticize their version of truth, the charges don't stick because, "it is true for them." This radical reshaping of truth, apart from correspondence or coherence theory has sweeping implications for society and especially the church. To radically redefine truth as it suits the individual or the social group does violence to every institution and every member of society. Postmodernists will often argue that two

---

[83]Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 430.

[84]This is the view of Stanley Fish and by extension Derrida and Foucault's view. Erickson, *The Postmodern World*, 52.

cultures cannot even communicate with each other because their languages are different.[85] For example, they will argue that "cat" in one culture may mean something entirely different in another culture, or the word for cat may be "Khat" or some other term. This inherent problem of translation, they argue, leads them to conclude that truth is relative to a particular culture. Postmodernist confuse the relativity of term selection "with an inability of language to represent objective reality."[86] This is a huge and unwarranted leap. We cross cultural and language barriers every day and have found ways of communicating across cultural lines. Even in America, our language often requires some translation. The word "cool" for example has been a reference for temperature as well as an adjective to describe a car or a new gadget. It is context that determines the meaning of our language and even when we have brief periods of misunderstanding, the puzzled looks we encounter normally lead to a quick translation that makes everything clear.

On this view of "socially constructed" truth, the argument follows that belief in God is a social construct and therefore God's existence is dependent on the existence of the society that believes in God. Presumably, if no society existed which believed in God; then God ceases to exist. Plantinga argues, "This claim on Rorty's part will constitute a defeater for Christianity only if he also makes us aware of some reason why we should believe it."[87] It seems to me that Rorty's claims cannot survive their own internal

---

[85] Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 94.

[86] Ibid., 95.

[87] Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 433.

inconsistency, they are self-referentially defeating. If truth is "what my peers will let me get away with saying," or a "social construct that works better," then on both counts Rorty's definition fails because we don't have to let him get away with using that definition and society is certainly not better off by using his definition of truth.[88]

Rorty seems to be suggesting that truth can be created by humans merely by making propositional statements. They become true if my peers let me get away with saying them or they become true because they work better for me. Plantinga takes this concept one step further by way of analogy. Suppose we as Christians assert that "God created the world." According to Rorty's definition, that our statements bring truth into being, then not only are we responsible for making the statement that "God created the world," we are also ultimately responsible for creating the world.[89] This clearly points to a fatal flaw in postmodern thinking.

There is also a problem in postmodernism with respect to logic. In their attempt to deconstruct all of modernity, they have also rejected the laws of logic including the "law of non-contradiction," which states that something cannot be true and at the same time false. Rorty's views of truth, "what my peers will let me get away with" or "what works better for me" effectively argues that each individual may assert their version of the truth or reality, even when it contradicts some other individual's "truth" and in his view, both

---

[88]It also begs the question of, what is better to believe. Who determines what is better to believe and upon what basis do we decide what is better? If morality is the basis, then upon whose definition of morality do we base our decision?

[89]Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 436.

versions of the truth are true.[90] It is one thing to say that a "premodern" culture may be epistemically justified in believing what their ancestors have taught them; it is quite another to say that their version of the truth is true, when it stands in contradiction to a modern culture. This is not to say that just because of the Enlightenment, all modern truth is to be taken as a settled issue, but certainly modernity has given us insights that cannot be rejected outright. Derrida would probably argue that this statement is just another example of the bias of power, the arrogance of modernity. What we are saying here is, not that modernity has all the answers, but that both cultures cannot both be right at the same time on the same issue; that violates the law of non-contradiction. To say that *A* is true and not-*A* is true at the same time is not only illogical, it is nonsensical.[91]

This postmodern rejection of logic has implications that go beyond evaluating cultures. It ultimately has led to a view that supports moral relativism and religious pluralism. In the area of morality, postmodern alternative logic suggests that each individual culture and for that matter each individual may choose what is right and wrong for

---

[90] Walter Truett Anderson illustrates the shift in worldview with an imaginary interview with three homeplate umpires who are explaining their philosophy of umpiring. "One says, 'There's balls and there's strikes and I call 'em the way they are.' The second ump responds, 'There's balls and there's strikes and I call 'em the way I see 'em.' The third says, 'There's balls and there's strikes and they ain't nothin' until I call 'em.'" Anderson goes on to explain that the first umpire is an objectivist. He operates on the basis of naïve realism. The second umpire is what Anderson calls a "constructivist." The constructivist view sees the pursuit of truth as something that we are working toward. The third umpire is a "postmodern radical." This umpire seems to fit well the attitudes of postmodernists such as Derrida, Foucault and Rorty. Walter Truett Anderson, *Reality Isn't What It Used to Be: Theatrical Politics, Ready-to-Wear Religion, Global Myths, Primitive Chic, and Other Wonders of the Postmodern World* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990), 75.

[91] Erickson illustrates this contradictory logic with a T-shirt he bought from the APA. The front of the shirt says, "The sentence on the back of this shirt is false." The back of the shirt says, "The sentence on the front of this shirt is true." Erickson, *The Postmodern World*, 85.

themselves, even when those moral choices stand in direct contradiction to other standards of behavior. Rorty's view that "what works better for me" means ultimately that each individual may say, "Stealing works better for me than working" and for postmodernists this would be an acceptable morality. The same can be said for religious pluralism. Postmodernists are not typically religious; however, their views of truth and reality allow for two contradictory religions to make truth claims that are exclusive and both, in their view, are right and true. For Christians, who make very exclusive truth claims, especially regarding the unique and finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross for the sinners of the whole world, this presents a challenge of monumental proportions. However, this view of postmodernism cannot stand up to its own internal consistency. It is self-referentially incoherent.

One final tenet of postmodernism deserves criticism; that is their rejection of "metanarratives." Postmodernists reject any all-encompassing "story" that seeks to paint the whole picture of reality as a completed whole. Instead they posit "mini-narratives" or as some call them "petit-narratives."[92] These are the stories of individual cultures that explain reality for them, without suggesting that they encompass the whole world or other cultures. Christianity, of course, is a grand metanarrative that explains all of reality from creation to apocalypse with moral directives, history, and objective truth. Christianity is not a mini-narrative meant only for the Western world or even for Christians alone. It tells the story of the Creation of all of mankind and the redemption plan for all of mankind. This is the very

---

[92]Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, xxiii-xxv.

form of metanarratives that postmodernists reserve for their deepest scorn. However, if their scorn for metanarratives is primarily focused on forms of oppression of the marginalized and the promotion of the self-interests of a privileged few, then Christians must work harder to demonstrate that our "metanarrative" is different. Christianity does not seek to oppress the marginalized, rather we believe that God can set all people free from the universal oppression of sin, death, guilt, bondage and shame. Our "metanarrative" is not designed to maintain the power of a selected few at the expense of others, ours is a "metanarrative" which understands all of humanity as subject to the bondage of sin and in need of a Savior. While I would agree that certain expressions of Christianity have been abusive and oppressive, it seems unwarranted to suggest that every "metanarrative" automatically results in the forms of oppression and abuse of power with which postmodernists have attributed all of them. In addition, it seems to me that postmodernists themselves are guilty of building their own metanarrative. Who says their all-encompassing view of reality, their view of history, truth and morality is not also a metanarrative? They, like Christianity suggest that their view of the world applies to all. Though they believe their allowance for individual cultures to make individual truth claims escapes this criticism; it seems to me that by their own definition, they have built themselves a metanarrative which is subject to their own criticism.

Summary

In this chapter, we have explored postmodernism from a historical and philosophical perspective and provided a critique of the epistemological views held by postmodernists. As I have stated, postmodernism represents a challenge to Christianity in general and preaching in particular, but I do not believe that it serves as a defeater for

Christian belief. What I have tried to demonstrate is that the seeds of their system's ultimate demise have been planted in their own epistemology. I have shown that postmodernists reject objective truth claims, but they must do so by making objective truth claims. They deconstruct truth and reality, but they insist deconstruction is exempt from deconstruction. They argue for an alternative logic, but by their own definition of logic, their view of logic would be both true and false. They reject metanarratives, but they must do so by building a new metanarrative. In the final analysis, postmodern philosophy appears to be self-referentially incoherent in every major tenet that we have examined and therefore, I would argue that it fails to provide a defeater for Christianity. However, this does not suggest that the move toward postmodernity does not represent a challenge to Christianity.

Postmodernism does present some challenges, but not unlike the challenges that Christianity has faced down through the centuries. The early church faced similar odds when their worldview radically challenged the worldview of the Roman Empire and the worldview of Judaism. It was not uncommon, during the first century, for Christians to be asked to put Jesus up in the pantheon with all the other Roman and Greek gods. If they would have been willing to do that, they could have kept their jobs and lived peaceably among their neighbors, but that was one thing they would not do. They challenged their culture and refused to allow a contrary worldview to frustrate their efforts to bring transformation to people who were captive to their culture.

In the next, chapter we will examine the challenges these tenets of postmodernity present to preaching in the contemporary world with a view toward finding ways to connect with postmoderns through preaching.

CHAPTER 3

THE CHALLENGE OF POSTMODERNISM

In light of the sweeping changes that have affected this culture, the preacher who stands before a congregation today must face the fact that business as usual will not suffice if we are to answer God's call to fulfill the Great Commission. Preachers today will stand before congregations whose worldviews will run the gamut from premodern to postmodern and perhaps as Erickson has suggested a few "postpostmoderns."[1] Their "premodern" parishioners will be happy to hear a message from God's word and acknowledge its truth without explanation or apology. Miracles, angels, demons, the virgin birth, substitutionary atonement and the bodily resurrection of Christ will need no further appeal beyond, "The Bible says . . . ." There will also be moderns in the congregation who will need some help with some of the more miraculous elements of Scripture. They will need encouragement to believe. For some moderns, an existential encounter with Christ will become their basis for belief. There may be still others who will pick and choose what they believe savoring some doctrines and setting others aside for further study.

---

[1]Millard J. Erickson *The Postmodern World: Discerning the Times and the Spirit of our Age* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2002), 118.

The postmoderns in the congregation present new challenges. Preachers have become very familiar with strategies for reaching the modern generation. We have had thousands of books written on apologetics and years of experience in dealing with moderns, but postmodernism is a new challenge that will require a new apologetic. As for the "postpostmoderns," if they are among us, they will have seen the pitfalls of postmodernity and hopefully found a release from the prison of doubt that so many postmoderns find themselves in today.

In this chapter I will demonstrate the emergence of postmodernism in contemporary culture. If postmodernism is just a fad on the university campus, then preachers could ignore the problem and carry on as if nothing has changed. However, I believe there is evidence to suggest that postmodernism is becoming more mainstream. Brian McLaren notes that Os Guiness has called postmodernism essentially a passing fad. However, he says,

> My sense is that on the philosophical level, where Os focuses his energies so astutely, that's more true than on the popular level. And while the philosophers often get balls rolling, popular culture, the arts, and even religion often turn the rolling snowball into an avalanche that takes on a life of its own, a life beyond anything the philosophers would have anticipated, or even desired. Sometimes that could be for better, and sometimes it could be for worse, a case of Frankenstein's monster, an experiment run amok.[2]

In fact, postmodernism has begun to infiltrate our culture to the extent that no preacher steps into a pulpit before a congregation untouched by this paradigm shift. It is a worldview that has grown in popularity in contemporary culture, and every preacher will

---

[2]Brian McLaren, "They Say It's Just a Phase," *Next Wave* (October 2002) [journal on-line] Accessed 8 October 2002. Available from http://www.next-wave.org/oct02/mclaren2002.htm; internet.

have to wrestle with its implications at some point. That brings me to the second point I want to make in this chapter, the challenge of preaching in a postmodern world. I will address the issues raised in the preceding chapter and demonstrate the challenge they present to preaching. The final portion of this chapter will be devoted to the various approaches that have been suggested for connecting with postmoderns. I will show how postmodernism forces pastors to reexamine the way they do preaching because the listeners have changed their way of thinking.

The Emergence of Postmodernism in Contemporary Culture

In the introduction, I pointed out that the popular film *Matrix* demonstrates in graphic form the feeling of the culture that what we see and experience everyday could in fact be artificial or contrived. Reality and truth have been called into question, not just by postmodern philosophers, but by the average person on the street. The advances in science with the theory of relativity, "super-string" theory, and the discovery of quantum mechanics and quarks, has caused this new generation to wonder if they really know anything for sure.

Matrix is a good example of where postmodernism has taken us. The skeptical arguments of Plato, Descartes and Hume are now up on the big screen for everyone to think about. What if we are being kept alive by machines and all of our thoughts are being controlled? How can we be sure that we know anything for sure? These are the questions epistemologists have been asking for centuries, but today these questions are not just being asked and answered by philosophers. They are being asked and answered by our neighbors, friends and fellow church members and the answers they are coming up with are changing

the way we communicate in the church. Postmodern thought is growing more widespread in our culture and affecting society as a whole, not just the university.[3] Graham Johnston notes, "Many pastors would be surprised at how postmodern some longstanding members seem. Postmodern thinking creeps into our lives not necessarily through conscious choices but through a steady stream of bombardment via movies, magazines, song and television."[4]

The movie industry has tuned into this culture much more effectively than we have in the church. There is a constant succession of themes which address the very ideas that we are examining. In the movie, *Truman,* Jim Carrey plays a young man who lives the perfect story book life in small town America. There is only one problem. Since his birth, he has been living in a large self-contained television studio filled with hidden cameras. His whole life is a "Reality TV" show and he is the only character who doesn't know the secret. Everything about his life is scripted in such a way that he never discovers the secret until the end of the movie. What makes this a postmodern film? It raises the question: "Can we ever know for sure that reality is what it seems to be?" Like *Matrix*, it raises doubts about knowing the truth and knowing reality objectively. What is tragic in the movie is the tenderness of Truman in his relationships, while all of his closest friends are totally dishonest with him. It leaves us with a sense of despair at the condition of the world that is so

---

[3]By "our culture" I mean primarily Western culture, but postmodernism is growing in our "global culture" as well. The emergence of modernization, globalization and urbanization is bringing the ideas once espoused only in university campuses to the far reaches of the globe. Certainly there are distinctions that could be made. In some local communities that are less affected by globalization, these ideas will still remain foreign, but as the world becomes "smaller" through globalization postmodernism will begin to shape those local communities as well. Harold Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith & Mission* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2001), 81-90. Please note, Netland argues for the term "culture of modernity" rather than "postmodernism" in his description of the paradigm shift in our culture.

[4]Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 15.

concerned about wealth and entertainment that the things in life that really matter are discarded and abused. Postmoderns do feel that something is missing in life, that the answers that modernism and science have provided are not sufficient.[5]

Pleasantville is another film with postmodern overtones. A boy is transported into a television set and finds himself in the black and white world of the 1950's. The town of Pleasantville is the never the same again. The once peaceful community begins to experience passion and the "gray" people begin to change to "colored" people. The movie is like a "sermon" extolling the virtues of a postmodern world over against the bygone era of the 1950s. It is a message that expresses the sentiments of Soren Kierkegaard and Existentialists. If you want to know truth, you must have an experience, a leap of faith to validate your experience.[6]

The popular television series, especially through the 1990s, *X-Files,* takes a stab at government suppression of truth. In one of the episodes, the show takes up the issue of the John F. Kennedy assassination and cleverly weaves the famous Zaprudo film and

---

[5]Another movie that has this same angst and seems written for postmoderns is *A.I.*, short for "Artificial Intelligence." In this Steven Spielberg film, an advanced society builds robots for menial tasks and then begins to treat them as sport, torturing them and destroying them. One scientist among them "creates" a robot so life-like that he eventually longs to be a "real" boy himself. His life becomes a quest to become human. What in this movie makes it postmodern? It speaks to the craving of our culture for something beyond the mechanistic and materialistic. It demonstrates the desire for understanding what it really means to be human.

[6]Let me point out one more example from the movie industry which points to a postmodern approach to reality. In the movie, *JFK*, we are introduced to a moving drama that depicts the investigation into the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Director Oliver Stone takes us deeply into various plots and subplots suggesting multiple lines of inquiry into the possible forces at work behind the assassination. Truth is mixed with fiction so creatively that a whole new generation has begun to question what they have been told by the government and history. It is truly an example of deconstruction at work in stripping away the fabric of history, by questioning the power biases that may have prevented the truth from coming to light. The audience is left with a huge question mark. Who really shot John F. Kennedy and what is the government hiding?

newsreels with modern innovations to reveal who truly shot JFK. The show constantly replays the theme, "The Truth is Out There." The truth is just waiting to be discovered, it's been suppressed by the government and unseen forces behind the government, but if a person is willing to question authority, they will be rewarded with the discovery of truth.

Contemporary culture is not only confronted with challenges to truth and reality, moral relativism is a constant theme of both the movie industry and television. We should note here that moral relativism is a feature of both modernity and postmodernity; however, I would argue that moral relativism in postmodernity has taken on a slightly different dimension as a result of the epistemological issues that have emerged in postmodernity. For example, in modernity the move to supplant revelation with reason suggested that morality could be based on rational grounds such as Kant's categorical imperative. In postmodernity, morality has no basis in either revelation or reason, but has become "socially constructed" so that the community is entitled to affirm their own version of morality without reference to any authority other than the group with which they associate.

William Brown suggests that "The visual imagery of television has aided and abetted the rise of postmodern culture, at least at the popular level of experience."[7] In the last decade, a growing number of popular television shows have depicted the "normal" family as a mixed up group of misfits with questionable morals. These "postmodern" families, "The Bundys" of *Married with Children,* "The Simpsons" in the cartoon depiction

---

[7]William E. Brown, "Theology in a Postmodern Culture: Implications of a Video-Dependent Society," in *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 159.

of a "normal" American family, *Southpark* and the characters of *Seinfeld* are "all losers without a clue."[8] They contrast sharply with the "modern" television shows of the 1950s and 1960s: *Father Knows Best, Ozzie and Harriet, the Dick Van Dyke Show, My Three Sons,* and *Leave it to Beaver*, where sex was never a topic and families had problems, but they worked them out in a morally respectable manner.[9] I am not suggesting that the television industry is responsible for moral decline. They could easily argue that they are not being prescriptive, but descriptive. They are describing what they see happening in American life and Americans can identify better with the "Bundys" than "Ozzie and Harriet." What I am suggesting is that the path that we have taken down this road away from morality has gone unchallenged and the contemporary family in the pew is not immune to the changes in the culture.

Popular television demonstrates the prevalence of postmodernism even in the more cerebral shows. Stanley Grenz has written a piece entitled, "Star Trek and the Next Generation: Postmodernism and the Future" in which he points out the shift in worldview between the older *Star Trek* series and *Star Trek: The Next Generation.* In the older show, a key character was Spock, who represented a human without emotions, totally scientific and rational, a paragon of modernity. In the *Next Generation*, the equivalent character is "Data," an android who longs to become human, but has capabilities that far surpass all human

---

[8] Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 28.

[9] The issue of what is considered "morally respectable" is certainly open to debate. In this context, I am referring to what the public at large would have considered "morally respectable." It could be argued that for many in our culture this form of morality hearkens back to a "premodern" or revelation-based view of morality. On the other hand, even the modern period views of morality not based on revelation were more likely to reflect something very close to a Judeo-Christian ethic.

beings.[10] His search for humanity and repudiation of his emotionless rationality, Grenz argues, points to the postmodern shift in society. It is an interesting viewpoint with which I agree. There are more comparisons in these two programs. In the older series, time was linear, in the new series time is fluid and many of the most interesting shows involve some form of non-linear space-time fluctuations that produce all sorts of interesting paradoxes. There is also a postmodern flavor to their "Prime Directive" which states that they are not to interfere with other cultures. Foucault and Derrida would be pleased. After all, according to them, every encounter with another culture has the prospect of imposing truth upon others based on a bias of power.

The emergence of postmodernism can also be seen in the legal arena. During the Clarence Thomas hearings conducted to determine whether or not to confirm his nomination to the Supreme Court, Thomas' religious background was examined. His background in Roman Catholic parochial schools was explored and some of the more liberal justices wondered if his view of right and wrong might be grounded in natural theology, the idea that morality is inherent in the universe. After much debate, the chairman of the committee instructed Thomas, "Right and wrong are what the United States Congress decides."[11]

Another legal case that became more of a daytime soap opera was the O. J. Simpson trial. That trial demonstrated that appeals to evidence and the law were not nearly

---

[10] Stanley J. Grenz, "Star Trek and the Next Generation: Postmodernism and the Future of Evangelical Theology," in *The Challenge of Postmodernism,* ed. David S. Dockery (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 75.

[11] Erickson, *Postmodern World*, 13.

as important as the feelings of the jurors. Simpson's attorney, Johnny Cochran, was able to make a defense that was largely an attack against the prosecution. What about Evidence? Who needs evidence when you know your audience is more likely to think in terms of social conscience or relative morality. One piece of "evidence" brought forth by the defense team was an audio tape recording of one of the investigating officers making scandalous racist statements. It was unfortunate, of course, that he made the racist statements in the first place, but that tape fostered the defense team's primary goal: turn the trial into a case about racism. One of the interesting outcomes of the trial involved assessments that were conducted on the opinions of Caucasians and African-Americans as to the outcome of the trial. African-Americans were overwhelmingly in favor of the outcome, while Caucasians were overwhelmingly critical of the acquittal of O.J. Simpson. Obviously, our country was and is racially divided, but that assessment points to a deeper problem, America no longer makes moral decisions based on objective criteria. Morality and truth are open to public debate and the culture by and large has embraced a sort of empowerment agenda that supports each person's right to choose their own version of truth and morality regardless of the consequences.

How did postmodernism enter the mainstream? We have already noted how mass media has contributed toward a wider acceptance of the postmodern views, but many scholars have attempted to determine how these philosophical views began to emerge in mainstream culture. David Harvey represents the prevailing view that the counter-cultural movements of the 1960s with their anti-modernistic perspectives gave rise to postmodernism in contemporary culture. He writes,

> Antagonistic to the oppressive qualities of scientifically grounded technical-bureaucratic rationality . . . the counter-cultures explored the realms of individualized self-realization through a distinctive "new left" politics, through the embrace of anti-authoritarian gestures, iconoclastic habits (in music, dress, language and life-style), and the critique of everyday life.[12]

Harvey goes on to suggest that this particular counter-cultural movement which began in universities, art institutes and on the cultural fringes of large cities, eventually spilled out into all the major cities and became a mainstream movement in our culture.[13] Veith also attributes the rise of postmodernism with the counter-cultural movement of the 1960s and adds that "the young people began questioning the fruits of modern civilization . . . . They sought instead a way of life organically related to nature and free of moral and rational constraints."[14] He adds that during that period the young people experimented with drugs and "cast off sexual prohibitions to realize total freedom and to pursue of life of untrammeled pleasure."[15] If their assessment is accurate, then the epistemological views of postmodernists became the paradigm that allowed the counter-cultural movement of the 1960s to find the liberation from the constraints of modernity that they had been seeking.

---

[12]David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1989), 38.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Culture* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1994), 40.

[15]Ibid.

The Challenge of Preaching to Postmoderns

What I am arguing is that postmodernism is not just a philosophical approach taken by academicians, it is emerging as a popular worldview in contemporary culture and it does not appear to be a passing fad. The attitudes of even "church" people have been shaped by this paradigm shift and preachers who fail to take this seriously may find themselves faced with people who consider their preaching totally irrelevant.

Who hasn't been in a Bible study class where the teacher asked the students, "What does this text mean to you"? I know my own response has been disgust. I call those sessions, "shared ignorance." This has become a growing trend, especially in the emergence of small group ministry in churches. Rare is the Bible teacher who studies the Bible carefully before a class and then shares the fruits of those labors. I am not suggesting there is no room for audience involvement. Quite the contrary, I believe God speaks through His Word in a way that each individual may derive application from the text that directly speaks to the circumstances of their life, but application and meaning in the text are quite different.[16]

It seems obvious to me that a revolution in thinking has begun to emerge even in our churches. Our pews are no longer filled with hungry hearts waiting to hear the

---

[16]Millard Erickson relates the story of an adult Bible class studying a doctrinal study book, in which the author stated that the Pharisees were not as disciplined as some have assumed. The author supported his argument with two texts in the gospels. Two women in the class objected to the author's argument citing that one text emphasized their rigorous keeping of the law. Another student appealed to a passage which called the Pharisees "lawless." A seminary professor in the class was consulted. He said, he didn't have his Greek text with him, but suggested that if the word used was *anomia*, then that would support the idea that the Pharisees were outwardly religious, but inwardly rebellious. The two women were still not convinced and the matter was dropped. These women were not willing to listen to the author who studied the text carefully, the additional text that threw more light on the issue or the seminary professor who had more training. They were sticking to their own opinion and perhaps put more stock in their emotional response than authoritative insight. Erickson, *Postmodern World*, 59-60.

preacher stand up and declare, "Thus saith the Lord." Instead, some of our people are sitting in the pews thinking, "So that's your opinion. I have another opinion."

Graham Johnston has correctly pointed out that, "What proved effective in communicating the gospel to a modern audience may not work in a postmodern culture."[17] In the modern world, we as preachers had two options when preaching: we could proclaim the Word of God with the knowledge that our people loved God and loved His Word, or we could take an apologetic approach and defend the Bible evidentially. Those approaches are less likely to appeal to a postmodern audience. They are far more skeptical and less likely to be moved by apologetical arguments. We will have to do more with this generation than we did with the previous one.

Postmodernism is now a reality in the pew. Our congregation members are not quoting Richard Rorty, Jacques Derrida or Michael Foucault, but they are espousing postmodernists views even if they have never been trained in postmodern philosophy. When in the past, we could stand in a pulpit and declare with unbridled authority, the truths of the Word of God; now we are viewed by some as trying to advance our own opinions and force them upon others. With regard to absolute truth, there is a growing scarcity of people, even in our pews, who will agree that there is such a thing as absolute truth. A survey was conducted at a large university and twenty students were asked if there is any such thing as absolute truth, "truth that is true across all times and cultures for all people." All but one of the students answered along the lines of: "Truth is whatever you believe." "There is no

---

[17] Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 18.

absolute truth." "If there *were* such a thing as absolute truth, how could we know what it is?" "People who believe in absolute truth are dangerous." The only exception was an evangelical Christian who said absolute truth was found in Jesus.[18] I am so glad that there was at least one, but all signs point to a population that will increasingly question everything and allow no one to stand up and say there are absolutes. What will become of the preaching of the Word of God authoritatively, if we abandon absolutes? My point is, postmodernism is emerging in our culture and even in our pews. Since God has called us to reach our generation, not some other generation, these are people we must love and reach out to with the message that truth matters, especially since we are delivering God's truth.

Approaches toward Connecting with Postmoderns

The response to the challenges presented by postmoderns has taken on a number of different approaches. The goal of preaching has always involved bridging the gap between the ancient world of the Biblical text and the contemporary audience. How we go about bridging that gap without sacrificing revelation or relevance is one of the greatest challenges in our contemporary context. On the one hand, we could water down the significance of revelation so as to avoid criticism from the contemporary audience, or we could diminish the significance of the philosophical approach of the contemporary audience. Either of these approaches may serve one side of that bridge well, but neither will meet the goal of bridging the gap and faithfully preserving both revelation and relevance. As Graham

---

[18] Jim Leffel, "Our New Challenge: Postmodernism," in *The Death of Truth* ed. Dennis McCallum (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1996), 31.

Johnston has said, "The task is to engage people anew, with a fresh voice so that even in this millennium, the gospel will remain the good news rather than yesterday's news."[19] But how do we go about doing that when the world has become so much more complicated since the advent of postmodernism?

Millard Erickson has provided a helpful classification of the varied approaches to connecting with postmoderns by utilizing a question posed to a panel as part of a professional society: "Can deconstructed horses even be led to water?"[20] There are three elements in this question that bear explanation: the deconstructed horses represent the postmodern audience, the water represents the message, the device that leads them to the water, say a rope, represents the method of bringing them to the message.

A variety of possible responses are possible. First, let me take up two negative responses. The question can be answered negatively, "No, deconstructed horses cannot be led to water, so ignore them and go after other horses." In other words, postmoderns cannot be reached, so ignore them and focus your attention on those who have not adopted postmodern views. Obviously, this is an approach that some ministers will take either out of frustration or lack of understanding. That does not seem to be a viable option. Another negative approach is, to say, "No, postmoderns cannot be reached, but if you ignore them and keep preaching maybe they'll come around some day." That approach has the

---

[19] Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 20.

[20] Millard J. Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith: Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 151.

same problems as the first, but may at least leave the door open for the minister to continue appealing to postmoderns. In my opinion, that still leaves those deconstructed horses thirsty.

There are several positive responses to this question that bear examination. First, we could reply, "Yes, the deconstructed horses can be led to water, but you have to deconstruct the water." This approach admits the postmoderns have accepted certain tenets of postmodernism, and therefore our message needs to be postmodernized. This would involve reframing our theology by eliminating the following: the objectivity of reality, the correspondence theory of truth, metanarratives, and objective morality, to name a few. This is the approach adopted by Mark Taylor, Middelton and Walsh, and Stanley Grenz. Mark Taylor, following in the tradition of Jacques Derrida "elides the concept of truth altogether in favor of language sport." He calls his theology "a/theology" and freely admits that his theology is "erratic or even erroneous" and therefore never fixed in meaning but always in transition.[21] Middleton and Walsh read the Scriptures through a postmodern lens and discover new dimensions in the Biblical text of which they were previously unaware.[22] Their readings may be in-step with postmodernism, but appear to sacrifice too much for the sake of relevance. Stanley Grenz, calls for a "revisioning" of evangelical theology and suggests that "efforts to establish the role of Scripture in Christian theology are 'ultimately

---

[21] Ted Cabal, "An Introduction of Postmodernity: Where are We, How Did We Get Here, and Can we Get Home?" *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 5, no. 2 (summer 2001): 6.

[22] J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than it Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1995), 5.

unnecessary.'"[23] The obvious problem with this approach is that it gives up too much and in the process leaves too much out. The goal in reaching postmoderns is not to open dialogue, though that may be an important first step. The goal is ultimately transformation and sacrificing revelation will not achieve that goal.

The second positive response is, "Yes, you can lead the deconstructed horses to water, but first the rope must be deconstructed." This response says that in order to reach postmoderns, we must change our preaching style altogether. This approach is better than the first approach because it doesn't sacrifice the message, at least in theory. One of the trends of the last three decades has been a move toward "Narrative Theology," a "Narrative Hermeneutic" and a "Narrative Homiletic." This trend often called the "New Homiletic" was birthed primarily as a reaction against deductive, propositional preaching. The contemporary advocates are saying that "propositional preaching is no longer a viable method of communicating with today's postmodern audience."[24] Fred Craddock is considered by many to have launched the movement. In his monograph entitled, *As One Without Authority,* he argued that the goal of preaching is not to communicate information, but to produce an experience in the audience, so that they see the world from the gospel perspective.[25] In some cases, this approach has resulted in adopting a narrative hermeneutic that reduces the

---

[23] R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "The Integrity of the Evangelical Tradition and the Challenge of the Postmodern Paradigm," in *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 66.

[24] David L. Allen, "Preaching and Postmodernism: An Evangelical Comes to the Dance," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 5, no. 2 (summer 2001): 64.

[25] Ibid.

Scripture to a text which can only produce revelation when it is properly heard or read. In other words, some have suggested with Brunner that the Bible becomes the Word of God when it is properly proclaimed. This must be summarily rejected. However, I do not believe we have to "throw the baby out with the bath water." It is true that some have utterly rejected propositional truth in order to make the message more palatable, but it is also possible to blend a narrative methodology harmoniously with propositional truth. The latter version seems much more promising in satisfying our twofold goal of retaining both revelation and relevance. This issue will be discussed more fully in later chapters.

The third response to our question, "Can deconstructed horses even be led to water?" is, "Yes, but the horse is not really deconstructed."[26] This approach says that, though they think they are deconstructed, in fact they are not. This position is adopted by David Wells, who is critical of evangelical collusion with modernity, but assumes that certain apologetic responses will still be effective with postmoderns. In some ways, Thomas Oden takes this approach. He suggests that what we are seeing in our culture is not "postmodernism," but is really, "ultramodernism" or "hypermodernism." In other words, these are moderns who have taken modernism to another level.[27] I would argue that, at least among the authors who accept the label "postmodern," they exhibit a strong tendency toward repudiation of at least some aspects of modernism. Some who adopt this position quite accurately point out that the Holy Spirit can still work in these hearts, even if they have

---

[26]Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith*, 152.

[27]Thomas C. Oden, *After Modernity . . . What? Agenda for Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 11.

accepted the views of postmodernism. However, I would contend that the depth of philosophical skepticism, or to use their language, "suspicion" that is inherent in postmodernism requires more from preachers than a casual nod. If we don't take this shift seriously, I fear that we may ultimately become irrelevant and lack any opportunity for reaching the coming generations.

It is interesting to me that these three approaches, change the message, change the method and reject the problem, are three approaches that the church used when faced with the challenge of modernism. Liberalism adopted the first two and Fundamentalism, at least to some degree, adopted the third. It seems to me that surely we can learn something from history, especially in light of the fact that a conservative response took so long to be formulated. Perhaps that is part of the reason why so many are reluctant to give up on apologetics toward modernity. We have finally got it nailed down, and now we are once again faced with a new challenge.

There is a fourth approach to this question, "we must first de-deconstruct the horse."[28] This approach suggests that we take up the challenge of postmodernism and either utilizing their own tools of deconstruction or some other arguments and we help them to move to a position more charitable toward Christianity. Erickson has pointed out that Francis Schaeffer took this approach even before we were using the term "postmodern." He was seeing the rejection of truth and the "line of despair" long before many others in the evangelical world were aware of what was happening in our culture. One of his goals at

---

[28]Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith*, 153.

L'Abri Fellowship was to help young philosophers see where their thinking was taking them and help them to reject a turn toward nihilism and despair and accept instead the message of hope in the gospel. I believe this is a valid enterprise and one of the more promising approaches to meeting the challenge of postmodernism. It may be difficult to utilize this approach from the pulpit, but it certainly has promise in various campus ministries.[29]

Another approach that cannot be overlooked is the position taken by Leonard Sweet. Using Erickson's analogy, he advocates "deconstructing the rope" calling on ministers to change the method they use for reaching postmoderns, but he suggests further that the ministers themselves need to be deconstructed. In *Carpe Manana* ("Sweetspeech" for "Seize Tomorrow"), Sweet labels everyone born before 1962 as an "immigrant" and everyone born after 1962 a "native."[30] This labeling has huge implications for ministry. It suggests that the younger emerging generation is so steeped in postmodern ways of thinking that deconstructing them is unlikely and may be impossible. Sweet takes an assimilationist perspective and argues that they don't need deconstructing; those of us who are "immigrants" need to learn to think more like them in order to minister to them. In *Postmodern Pilgrims*, Sweet sets out to develop a plan for ministering to postmoderns, suggesting that:

> Ministry in the twenty-first century has more in common with the first century than with the modern world that is collapsing all around us. *Postmodern Pilgrims* aims to demodernize the Christian consciousness and reshape its way of life according to a more Biblical vision of life that is dawning with the coming of the postmodern era.[31]

---

[29] James W. Sire has written a piece detailing this type of strategy on campuses entitled, "Why Should Anyone Believe Anything at All?" in *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 100.

[30] Leonard D. Sweet, *Carpe Manana* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 14.

[31] Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims*, xvii.

Unlike some of the authors who have written about postmodernism, Sweet is totally positive and extremely optimistic. He sees the church of the future reaching out with love to the postmoderns and adapting our methods and approaches to meet their needs. There is much in Sweet's position that I find attractive. His optimistic attitude and willingness to "become all things to all men in order that he may save some" is compelling and worth further investigation. The main thesis of *Postmodern Pilgrims* is the development of a ministry model that he calls "EPIC." This is an acronym for "experiential, participatory, image-laden and connected" and with this approach he argues that the church can be "Biblically absolute, but culturally relative."[32] While I want to retain the right to be critical of the postmodern worldview, I do think it is possible to weave these elements seamlessly into our preaching in order to reach postmoderns.

One of Sweet's more salient points is his description of the sweeping changes that have come about as a result of the advent of the internet. Sweet argues that these elements, experiential, participatory, image-laden, and connected, are what drive postmoderns to the internet world and they are essential to their way of viewing reality and apprehending truth. Therefore, he urges churches in general and ministers in particular to take these elements seriously when developing programs and preaching sermons aimed at reaching postmoderns.

According to Sweet, postmoderns actually think in completely new ways. He points out that the old way of thinking was more linear, the new way is non-linear or "loopy." He even argues that the changes in learning style are the reason so many children

---

[32] Ibid., xxi.

are prescribed Ritalin for Attention Deficit Disorder. He quotes one teenager who while swallowing his Ritalin, asked his mom, "Do you think they'll ever stop giving pills to kids who think in circles and not straight?"[33] Sweet explains this distinction between linear and non-linear thinking:

> Linear competence is single-minded. The teacher occupies center stage. It's "skill and drill" exercises stress memory retention, reduction meaning, and creation of an ordered worldview with cause and effect and beginnings and endings. It's "workplace" is the classroom. Nonlinear, digital competence is stacked. The student occupies center stage. It stresses rapid hand-eye coordination, mental ability to make quick connections, the ability to organize information, skills at accessing rather than memorizing information, and puts a "spin" on meaning rather than reduces it. It's "workplace" is anywhere.[34]

Other writers have begun to use the term "abduction" for the way postmoderns apprehend truth. It is neither by deduction or induction, but through a sense experience that existentially captures their imagination and causes them to believe.[35] Sweet argues that postmoderns do not come to church asking, "Is it true?" rather they come asking, "Is it real?" In other words, they aren't looking for proof, they want an experience.[36] The implications for this new way of thinking and believing are the primary reasons Sweet has made such sweeping suggestions for altering the way churches do business in the postmodern world.

---

[33] Sweet, *Carpe Manana*, 68.

[34] Ibid.

[35] E. Gary Purdy, Jr., "Christ-Centered Preaching to a Postmodern Audience" (D.Min. diss., Reformed Theological Seminary, 2001), 102. Purdy quotes Brian McLaren and Steve Rabey who have argued that stories and images that touch the senses cause listeners to be "abducted" by the truth. c.f. Brian McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) and Steve Rabey, *In Search of Authentic Faith: How Emerging Generations are Transforming the Church* (Colorado Springs: Waterbook Press, 2001), also Leonard Sweet has a new book coming out entitled, *"A" is for Abduction.*

[36] Leonard D. Sweet, *Soul Tsunami* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 215.

Many of Sweet's suggestions are helpful, especially his attitude of love toward postmoderns. We certainly will not reach this culture if we spend all of our time attacking it. One way to express our love toward postmoderns and avoid attacking them is by taking seriously their unique needs and making it a priority to take them into consideration when preparing sermons intended to reach them. Amy Mears and Charles Bugg wrote an article pointing out some of the unique needs of postmodern audiences. They suggest five needs that are often overlooked and bear special consideration in a postmodern context: "the need for acceptance, the need for hope, the need for ecological awareness, the need for inclusion, and the need for distinctiveness."[37] It probably comes as no surprise that postmoderns have a need for acceptance. After all everyone has this need. What postmoderns most need in this area is an understanding that God will accept them, even in their sinful state, but God's love goes further. God wants them to experience a radical shift in their thinking and morality that He can bring about through Christ. It is one thing to say that we accept someone as they are, but to leave them in that state in the name of love or tolerance is a poor concept of love indeed. Obviously postmoderns need hope. If their belief system is permeated by postmodern relativism, our preaching can provide them with an escape from the nihilism and solipsism of postmodernity. Our approaches to reaching them should reflect the hope found in assurance that we have through Jesus Christ. The postmodern need for ecological awareness represents a more difficult prospect. It is true as Mears and Bugg have pointed out that "Some evangelicals have viewed the so-called social

---

[37] Amy Mears and Charles Bugg, "Issues in Preaching in the 21st Century," *Review and Expositor* 90, no. 1 (winter 1993): 341.

gospel with suspicion." And getting people saved has been a higher priority than "getting the world saved."[38] Recognizing that "this is our Father's world" and God has given us "dominion" over the earth, Mears and Bugg suggest that our ministry to postmoderns take into consideration this postmodern concern. In some cases, our evangelical eschatology has eschewed our focus on the planet, recognizing that God will create a "new Heaven and a new Earth." However, protecting and preserving the planet does fit within our Biblical mandate in Genesis and being sensitive to this need in postmoderns may go a long way toward ministering to them. The postmodern need of distinctiveness reflects a desire we see emerging especially among postmodern youth. The tattooing and piercing craze of our culture points to this need to establish uniqueness in a world of relativism. What postmoderns need to hear from us in the pulpits is a message of the distinctiveness of Christianity. If we send the signal that Christians are just like everyone else with no distinction, then we run the risk of establishing what so many already believe, that we are nothing more than hypocrites. Our pulpits should ring with a call to be different from the world, to be set apart for God's purpose. In the 1960s the hippie culture latched onto this message in the "Jesus movement." What turned many of them away from the church was the appeal within the churches for the hippies to become more like them. They were supposed to cut their hair, shave and wear polyester and only then would they be accepted. Our appeal to this generation must look beyond the outward trappings of contemporary expressions toward an inward distinctiveness found in Jesus.

---

[38] Ibid., 345.

The fifth need, Mears and Bugg point out is the need for inclusion.[39] It is true that we have been guilty of using "non-inclusive" language. I am not suggesting here that we must use inclusive language when it comes to God, but I do think it would be helpful if we translate some of the male dominant language of the Bible so that it reflects both genders. Paul wrote in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." We would do well to reflect this inclusiveness in our preaching to postmoderns.

In addition to these five needs, I think it would be helpful to point out some of the epistemological needs of postmoderns. We noted earlier that postmodernists employ a "hermeneutic of suspicion." They are suspicious of truth claims that, in their opinion, often harbor a hidden agenda of the privileged few or oppression of the marginalized. This suggests that in order to connect with postmoderns, we should take seriously their need to evaluate truth claims carefully. Certain Christian movements have been guilty of the very charges postmodernists lodge against them, but I believe that our message of truth can be presented in a fashion that allays their suspicions. After all, Christianity is a message of deliverance for the oppressed and an offer of salvation to the "whosoevers," not the privileged few. Along these same lines, the employment of various lessons learned from deconstruction can be a helpful way of meeting this need for careful evaluation of truth claims. I am not suggesting we "deconstruct" the gospel, but demonstrating that we

---

[39] Ibid., 342.

understand why deconstructionism has been employed may help to meet this need among those who are extremely suspicious of every truth claim.

We pointed out earlier that postmodernists reject all "metanarratives" as explanations for reality that are too all-encompassing and often marginalize the oppressed. This suggests that postmoderns have a need to feel that their "story" is not left out by some over-arching scheme of reality. We must work hard to demonstrate that the message of the Christian gospel is a story about all of humanity and includes every single person, not some powerful few, a single culture, race or ethnicity. In order to meet these epistemological needs, we must avoid assuming too much about our audience. We have often been guilty of employing a sort of "Christianese" language, assuming that everyone who comes to church must know the meaning of the theological terms we use. In order to meet these epistemological needs, we may have to employ some of the methods utilized by missionaries who face translation of the Christian gospel, not only into new languages, but new cultures as well. The cultural elements of Christianity, which are often assumed to be essential elements of Christianity, are in some cases particularistic social models borrowed from the secular world and baptized into the church. Unpacking these social and cultural elements may be the greatest tool we have in reaching postmodern audiences.

The remainder of this thesis will be devoted to developing an approach to preaching to this postmodern culture. I will argue that our message does not have to be changed to reach postmoderns, but our methods for preaching can be adapted so that revelation is not sacrificed and relevance is retained.

CHAPTER 4

PREACHING TO POSTMODERNS

We have argued up to this point that postmoderns apprehend truth in a decidedly different way than their modern or pre-modern counterparts and we have shown that this trend toward postmodern thinking is emerging in both the culture and in the pew. This suggests that preaching in a postmodern world will involve new challenges. Before we take up the issue of preaching, perhaps we should ask the question if preaching is even necessary. It could be argued, I suppose, that what we need to do is focus on different forms of evangelism or missions. After all, George Gallup conducted a poll on church attendance and found that "more than 44% of all American adults eighteen and over are unchurched; that is, they haven't gone to church in the last six months. That would be more than 78 million adults."[1]

David Hilborn has argued that contemporary evangelical leaders are saying that "the expository age" has come to an end with the demise of the Enlightenment. He suggests that "new methods of evangelism and new styles of worship must be developed if the church is not to suffer the fate of a maladapted dinosaur in the postmodern cultural

---

[1]Don Bartel, "Evangelizing Postmoderns Using a Mission Outpost Strategy," in *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 343.

environment which increasingly dominates the western world."[2] His view that preaching will take on a minor role in the days ahead seems short-sighted and pessimistic. It is true that, as the landscape continues to shift toward postmodernism, preachers will have to adjust, but preaching will continue to have a role to play. It should also be pointed out that our audiences will not be entirely composed of postmoderns. We will still have moderns and "pre-moderns" occupying our pews for years to come. Evangelistic techniques which incorporate new insights into reaching postmoderns are currently being developed and a new environment does indeed call for new approaches to evangelism; however, preaching occupies a place in the church which extends beyond evangelism.

Don Bartel suggests that America is now a mission field and our approach should be more like a "mission outpost strategy."[3] He says, we should adopt the policy of the Navigators, team up and go out and reach this unchurched world. Jimmy Long suggests we develop a "loving community." He quotes an InterVarsity staff member who defines a loving community this way, "The greatest apologetic for Christianity is not a well-reasoned argument but a wildly loving community. Our Lord did not say they will know us by our truths, as important as that is; truth is very important, but they will know us by our love."[4] I readily agree with both these approaches to evangelism and I am sure that we need a broad range of approaches to meet the vast needs of postmoderns; however, I believe that preaching

---

[2]Quoted in Roy Clements, "Expository Preaching in a Postmodern World," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 23, no. 2 (April 1999): 174.

[3]Bartel, "Evangelizing Postmoderns," 343.

[4]Jimmy Long, "Generating Hope: A Strategy for Reaching the Postmodern Generation," in *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns,* ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 328.

must not be abandoned. It is not an outdated approach to reaching people and ministering to people. When the "mission outposts" and "loving communities" have reached a postmodern, they will need someplace to send them where they can grow as Christians and be equipped to reach back to their friends and neighbors outside the church. We will not even be finished with postmodern issues once a person becomes a Christians. True, they will hopefully have shifted a great deal, but the lingering effects of holding a postmodern view will have long lasting impact on the way they apprehend truth for years to come. Having argued that preaching is still valuable, let me point out some approaches to preaching that have been utilized primarily due to the challenge presented by postmodernism.

Contemporary Approaches to Preaching

Arturo Azurdia has written a book entitled, *Spirit Empowered Preaching: The Vitality of the Holy Spirit in Preaching*. His work is not primarily aimed at the challenge of postmodernism, but he does offer some insights into some of the approaches that have become prevalent in our contemporary culture. He cites two modern methods that are relevant to this discussion: the use of psychology and the use of marketing strategy. Both of these, he argues can be employed without the help of the Holy Spirit.[5] He points out that some preachers have abandoned the Word of God and instead use psychology in their preaching. This approach begins with a need in the congregation and the preacher then searches through self-help books or psychology books for an answer to that need. The

---

[5] Arturo G. Azurdia, *Spirit Empowered Preaching: The Vitality of the Holy Spirit in Preaching* (Great Britain: Christian Focus, 1998), 30.

preacher develops the message and just before delivery, inserts a Bible verse or two here and there to make the sermon seem Biblical.

A second approach is the use of marketing strategies, Azurdia is particularly critical of some of the church-growth models. This approach again begins with a need in the contemporary society and develops a strategy for meeting that need. These sermons usually provide a step-by-step approach to overcoming some problem in much the same way that a self-help book handles problems. In some ways, this is preaching by polling. The preacher finds out what topics he should dwell on and which topics to avoid. Sermons on marriage and family are fair game. Sermons on sin, hell, or judgment are avoided like the plague. This approach ultimately strips the Word of God of any truths that might turn people off. In a way, the preacher who adopts this strategy sacrifices revelation for the sake of relevancy. Those who advocate these approaches argue that they work. They produce the desired results, so therefore they should be employed. I have kicked these approaches around in my mind from time to time. On the one hand, I want to affirm them because people are being saved and churches are growing under this preaching, but on the other hand, I can not help but feel that we are sacrificing too much for the sake of our concept of results.

Tim Keller wrote an article entitled, *Preaching morality in an amoral age*, in which he argues that preaching on moral issues must avoid two extremes, pragmatism and moralism.[6] In the pragmatic approach, preaching moral issues involves teaching our people that being moral works out best in the long run. For example, sex outside marriage can lead

---

[6]Tim Keller, "Preaching Morality in an Amoral Age," *Leadership* 17 (winter 1996): 112-115.

to disease and ruined lives both emotionally and spiritually. The problem with this approach is that it ultimately breaks down. A person might use this approach for a while, but then discover that sin can lead to short-term happiness and that may become the highest good and therefore pragmatic. After all, as Keller writes, "Christian morality is not true because it works; it works because it's true."[7]

The other approach is moralistic. This is preaching that says, "You should be moral because God commands it" or "You should be moral because it's the right thing to do." The problem with this approach is that it could easily be confused with the teachings of almost any other religious tradition. What sets Christianity, in terms of morality, apart from Buddhism, Hinduism or Islam? The key difference is grace. We don't believe that Christians are working their way toward God. We believe that God has come down to us. We live our lives morally, not so that God will be indebted to us, but because we are indebted to God.[8]

The problem with adopting either a pragmatic or moralistic approach is that they are unbiblical, but perhaps there's more. They ultimately may produce the very effect we are trying to avoid, moral relativism and pluralism. Yet these two approaches are more prevalent than we would like to admit. The use of psychology and the use of marketing strategy are really just another way of viewing moralism and pragmatism. The tools of psychology can be employed by people of any faith and could easily lead adherents to shop

---

[7]Ibid., 114.

[8]Ibid., 115.

around for a religion that meets their psychological needs better. The tools of marketing research are employed to produce results. They work, but since tough issues are avoided, morality could easily become relative under that type of preaching. What we are seeking is an approach to preaching that avoids these pitfalls, yet communicates the truths of Scripture without hedging or shading to a postmodern audience.

We turn now to a discussion of the manner of preaching that employs both the mandate for Biblical proclamation and the necessity of communicating that message to postmoderns in a way that transforms lives. I will be defending expository preaching as the best model for both remaining true to Scripture and connecting the transforming message of Scripture to a postmodern audience.

Expository Preaching

Broadly speaking, preaching can be categorized under four classifications based on their homiletical structure. The four types of sermons are the "textual sermon," the "topical sermon," the "textual-topical sermon" and the "expository sermon."[9] Of these four, I would argue that the expository sermon is by far the superior sermon form, especially in a postmodern world. Let me point a few reasons for this assertion. First, the "expository sermon," draws the main idea, main points and subdivisions directly from the text

---

[9] John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 4th ed. rev. Vernon L. Stanfield (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), 54-60. The "textual" sermon draws its main idea directly from the text, but the divisions of the sermon do not necessarily follow in the same order or with the same flow as the original text. The "topical sermon" draws its main idea and points from some topic that the preacher chooses to develop. Starting with the topic, the preacher then searches the Scriptures to find a particular passage or a selection of passages that teach some message on that topic. The third type of sermon, the "textual-topical sermon," is really a hybrid of the first two. The sermon idea and main points are derived from both the text and the topic.

maintaining the original order of the Scripture passage. The strength of this approach is found in its concern for maintaining the author's original intent and the purpose which the Holy Spirit had in mind when the passage was inspired. Second, expository preaching is the one method of the four listed above that most strongly supports and defends a conservative doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture in that the thoughts and words of the Scripture writers are understood as inspired by the Holy Spirit and profitable (2 Tim. 3:16). Third, it prevents some of the inherent weaknesses in the other three methods, such as imposing ideas on the text, ignoring important theological truths, or developing a structure that fits the preacher's predisposition, but not necessarily the original author's predilection.

It should be borne in mind that postmoderns, in general, are suspicious of truth claims, especially when they consider them the opinions of one particular individual. Expository preaching represents the best approach to solving the dilemma of communicating truth to a truth-defying audience, primarily because the truth claims are not the preacher's own, but the truth claims of God Himself. In other words, expository preaching takes its starting point from a view that God has revealed truth to us in the Scriptures and the role of the preacher is to bring that revelatory truth down to the hearts and lives of their contemporary audience.

While this is the intent, it does not necessarily follow that all members of a congregation will accept the message as one that comes from God, but no other sermon type holds as much promise for accomplishing that feat and doing so in a way that listeners can readily see this goal throughout the preaching event. Before explaining this approach in greater detail, let me point out one other attractive characteristic of expository preaching. Of

all the preaching models presented, this model is perhaps the most versatile of them all. Expository preaching can be adapted to a wide variety of literary genre. It is just as effective when used for preaching narrative texts, as it is for parables, poetry, history or epistles. It also can be adapted to a variety of homiletical formats, such as the deductive, inductive and a combination of deductive and inductive. In the next chapter, I will be arguing that the inductive model of expository preaching is best suited for connecting with postmoderns. With that introduction, we will take up a more detailed explanation of expository preaching.

Haddon W. Robinson defines expository preaching as "the communication of a Biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers."[10] Several ideas emerge from this definition that illuminate what is meant by expository preaching. It is preaching that depends upon a passage of Scripture as the foundation for the entire sermon. Rather than beginning with a topic or some idea from the mind of the preacher, the sermon flows entirely from the text. It is also preaching that communicates a concept that is derived from and transmitted through the passage in its context. This is extremely important. The preacher who studies a text to determine the historical, grammatical and literary style of text must do much more than preach his exegetical material. That material must be probed in light of the context. Individual words and grammatical constructions are enlightening, but when

---

[10]Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 20.

separated from their context, they are meaningless at best and harmful at worst. As the old saying goes, "a text without a context is a pretext."

Robinson points out that orthodox theologians believe God has inspired, not just the thoughts of the original writer, but also the individual words.[11] But these words must never be divorced from their original context, lest the preacher be guilty of substituting his own ideas in place of the inspired truths of Scripture.

Two other ideas emerge from Robinson's definition. He suggests that expository preaching occurs when the concept derived from the text is applied first to the expositor and then from the expositor to the hearers. This means that the truth must first be applied to the heart and personality of the preacher and then to the hearers. When preachers stand up to deliver a sermon, they are not just delivering a message from God, they are also delivering themselves. Robinson writes, "The audience does not hear the sermon, they hear the man."[12] What is critical in Robinson's definition is the care that must be taken in ensuring that preaching is truly characterized by, "Thus saith the Lord." Anything short of that are just the opinions of men.

John Stott suggests that the task facing every preaching is bridging the chasm between the two horizons of the Biblical text and the contemporary world. He wrote, "It is across this broad and deep divide of two thousand years of changing culture (more still in the

---

[11] Ibid., 21.

[12] Ibid., 24.

case of the Old Testament) that Christian communicators have to throw bridges."[13] These two horizons mark a major distinctive of the expository approach. In expository preaching, the sermon takes into consideration both the Biblical world and the contemporary audience. Neither is diminished or excluded and in expository preaching the Biblical text is the starting point for the sermon.[14] What is distinctive about these two elements is both the starting point and the fact that both are included in the preparation and delivery process. This contrasts sharply with topical preaching which often begins with the audience in mind, rather than the Biblical text, and may in fact put more emphasis on the audience than on the Biblical text.

John Piper has studied the preaching life of John Calvin and concluded that his commitment to expository preaching rested on three firm convictions: First, "Calvin believed that the Word had been taken away from the churches" and needed to be restored to the people.[15] Second, Calvin feared those who would preach from the pulpit their own ideas. He believed that "by expounding Scriptures as a whole, he would be forced to deal with all that God wanted to say, not just what he might want to say."[16] Third, Calvin saw majesty in the Word of God that manifested the majesty of God and he wanted that expressed through all of Geneva and the whole world in the context of his ministry and pastoral care. Like John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards was also conscious of this tendency for preachers to preach their

---

[13] John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the 20th Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 138.

[14] Clements, "Expository Preaching," 178-179.

[15] John Piper, "The Divine Majesty of the Word: John Calvin, the Man and His Preaching," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 3, no. 2 (summer 1999): 13.

[16] Ibid., 13-14.

ideas rather than the truths of God. In an ordination sermon, Edwards said these words, "Ministers are not to preach those things which their own wisdom or reason suggests, but the things already dictated to them by the superior wisdom and knowledge of God."[17]

Obviously almost anything can be called preaching, but there some examples that are rather embarrassing to every preacher. It seems clear, that expository preaching when properly utilized carries both the authority of the Word of God and eliminates the trap of allowing the preacher's own imagination or pet ideas dominate the sermon in contradiction to God. In defense of expository preaching, D. A. Carson wrote an article offering six reasons why we should not abandon expository preaching:

> (1) It is the method least likely to stray from Scripture, (2) It teaches people how to read their Bibles, (3) It gives confidence to the preacher and authorizes the sermon, (4) It meets the need for relevance without letting the clamor for relevance dictate the message, (5) It forces the preacher to handle the tough questions, and (6) It enables the preacher to expound systematically the whole counsel of God.[18]

One of the great benefits often mentioned by expositors is the way expository preaching can lend new color and excitement to what may otherwise become rather dull. Each new passage of Scripture adds fresh new insight to the "old, old story" allowing it to live and breathe again with new life and vitality.[19]

---

[17] Kenneth P. Minkema and Richard A. Bailey, eds. "Reason, Revelation, and Preaching: An Unpublished Ordination Sermon by Jonathan Edwards." *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 3, no. 2 (summer 1999): 22.

[18] D.A. Carson, "Six Reasons Not to Abandon Expository Preaching," *Leadership* 17 (summer 1996): 87-88.

[19] J. Grant Swank, Jr., "Excitement About Expository Preaching," *Preaching* 6, no. 1 (July-August 1990): 9.

D. Martin Lloyd-Jones provides this helpful clarification on expository preaching:

> True expository preaching is, therefore, *doctrinal* preaching, it is preaching which addresses specific truths from God to man. The expository preacher is not one who "shares his studies" with others, he is an ambassador and a messenger, authoritatively delivering the Word of God to men. Such preaching presents a text, then, with that text in sight throughout, there is deduction, argument and appeal, the whole making up a message which bears the authority of Scripture itself.[20]

It seems natural to assume that every preacher has a desire to preach the Word of God rather than his or her own opinions. Yet it seems likely that most preachers have had that experience when they have found some great truth that is begging to be proclaimed only to discover that no text in Scripture supports it well enough to declare it as a truth from God. It is this very circumstance that calls for preachers to adopt this model of preaching as the most authoritative and the closest link to the pure revelation of God if they ever hope to preach so as to declare, "Thus saith the Lord."

Richard Mayhue provided a helpful summary, suggesting the following are minimal elements that identify expository preaching:

> (1) The message finds its sole source in Scripture. (2) The message is extracted from Scripture through careful exegesis. (3) The message preparation correctly interprets Scripture in its normal sense and its context. (4) The message clearly explains the original God-intended meaning of Scripture. (5) The message applies the Scriptural meaning for today.[21]

---

[20] Iain H. Murray, *D. Martin Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1961* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1990), 261.

[21] Richard L. Mayhue, "Rediscovering Expository Preaching," in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* ed. Richard L. Mayhue (Dallas: Word, 1992), 12.

Developing the Expository Sermon

Expository preaching is a noble goal indeed, but how does one go about developing an expository sermon? Of all the books that have been written on sermon development, I find the ten stages of development employed by Haddon Robinson in *Biblical Preaching* to be the most helpful. His ten stages are: (1) Selecting the passage, (2) Studying the passage, (3) Discovering the Exegetical Idea, (4) Analyzing the Exegetical Idea, (5) Formulating the Homiletical Idea, (6) Determining the Sermon's Purpose, (7) Deciding How to Accomplish This Purpose, (8) Outlining the Sermon, (9) Filling in the Sermon Outline, and (10) Preparing the Introduction and Conclusion.[22] Without suggesting I can improve upon his formula, I would like to condense his ten stages down to just five for simplicity sake.

Selecting the Passage

The selection of the passage may come about in a variety of ways. A theme, doctrine or occasion may become the genesis of a sermon. In that case, text selection may be guided by that theme or occasion. Some preachers will want to preach through a book of the Bible, and therefore selection of the text will involve selecting the next "preachable" unit of Scripture in the Book they are working through. By "preachable," I mean a passage, normally a paragraph either in the original language or a good English translation that contains just one main idea and perhaps a number of subsidiary ideas. Robinson suggests we

---

[22]Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 51-174.

"base the sermon on some unit of Biblical thought."[23] Jay Adams, in his book entitled, *Preaching with Purpose*, suggests that we select our text by determining the purpose of the passage we plan to preach.[24] Often a passage of Scripture will have many sub-purposes, but one major overall purpose. The key to developing a sermon that has one main idea is to zero in on this one major purpose and select the text that encompasses that one purpose.

Developing the Exegetical Idea

The development of the exegetical idea is so important that the sermon stands or falls on this one step in construction. Developing this exegetical idea involves three processes. First, the preacher must study the text thoroughly using all available tools.[25] One of the most important aspects of this step is the study of the context. The context takes on many forms. There is the immediate context, the verses before and after the text. There is the context within the larger scope of the book itself. There is the context of the other works produced by that same author. There is the context of the historical period and the setting when the book was written. There is the context of the geographical area where the book was written and the area of the intended audience. Finally, there is the context of the whole Bible, the canonical context, understanding that ultimately the Holy Spirit is the author of all Scripture and therefore does not contradict Himself in any particular passage of the Bible.

---

[23] Ibid., 55.

[24] Jay E. Adams, *Preaching with Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 1.

[25] Gordon Fee has a very helpful 15 step process for New Testament Exegesis. Gordon D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 15-17. And Douglas Stuart has developed a similar 12 step process for Old Testament Exegesis. Douglas Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Primer for Students and Pastors* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), 19-22.

Studying the context alone in light of a given passage of Scripture will give the exegete a mass of information that will help to clarify and develop the meaning of the passage.

The next step is equally crucial, examining the individual words and grammatical constructions of the selected text. There are abundant resources available to do this regardless of whether we have good skills with the original languages or not.[26] Grammars, concordances, word-study books, commentaries and many other resources will help at this stage.

It is during this stage that the preacher must begin looking for the exegetical idea. The exegetical idea is the single thought that runs through the text that all other parts of the text are wrapped around. In some cases, the preacher may discover that there is more than one main idea in the text selected. If that occurs, it is probably best to narrow the text accordingly so that one single idea can be communicated. Why is this important? It is hard for most members of our congregations to grasp one solid Biblical idea. It is probably even more difficult to try to grasp two or three. Once this single Biblical idea emerges, the rest of the sermon finds its place in relation to this one main idea. Therefore, the discovery of this idea and its development is crucial to sermon construction.

In order to have homiletical value, the exegetical idea should be a complete statement. Robinson suggests that an idea must have a subject and a complement.[27] By that he means that the exegetical idea is a complete thought. Suppose you want to preach on 1

---

[26] James Stitzinger has provided an exhaustive list of very helpful study tools that are readily available. James Stitzinger, "Study Tools for Expository Preaching," in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* ed. Richard L. Mayhue (Dallas: Word, 1992), 177-208.

[27] Robinson, *Biblical Preaching,* 39.

Corinthians 13. The subject is clearly "love," but that one word is not a complete thought and the passage has much to say about love, which are the complements of that subject. An exegetical idea from this passage might be, "The supremacy of love over spiritual gifts." Now you have something you can preach. You might show in this sermon *how* love is supreme or *why* love is supreme over spiritual gifts.

By the same token, it is important to determine what the author had in mind and what God had planned when these words were inspired. Is the key idea in 1 Corinthians 13 spiritual gifts or love? They are both mentioned, but careful exegesis will unlock the key idea that love is supreme over spiritual gifts. Once that idea is exposed, for that is the reason we call it "expository" preaching, the application will emerge and the sermon will almost preach itself! However, we are not finished yet.

Formulating the Homiletical Idea

The next step in the development of the expository sermon is the formulation of the homiletical idea, sometimes referred to as the "proposition" or Haddon Robinson's "big idea."[28] The exegetical idea defines what the Scripture passage is about, but the homiletical idea relates that Scriptural truth to a particular audience. Each preacher has a unique audience with unique needs and unique perspectives. This task of determining how to frame the exegetical idea so that it communicates truth to a particular group of people requires not only the exegesis of the Scripture passage, but an exegesis of the people who will receive the message. Preaching a sermon on 1 Corinthians 13 to a group of seasoned

---

[28] Ibid., 34.

Christians in the "Bible Belt" will have to be modified considerably if the audience is a group of high school teenagers in California.

Paul Windsor suggests that preaching is "multi-dimensional," while exegesis begins with the text, "it must extend to the preacher, the listener and to the world."[29] He goes on to say, "Never has Bonhoeffer's call for 'worldly' preaching been more urgent, or Barth's 'Bible in one hand, newspaper in the other' maxim more in need of re-invention!"[30] This is particularly true in our day. As we have pointed out, postmoderns have unique needs that must be taken into consideration when formulating the homiletical idea.

Haddon Robinson points out that, "when anyone makes a declarative statement, only four things can be done to develop it. It can be restated, explained, proved, or applied. Nothing else. To recognize this simple fact opens the way to developing the sermon."[31] Sometimes restating the exegetical idea in interesting and provocative ways can be illuminating, and accomplish all that is needed to meet the needs of the particular audience, but it may not prove as significant as explaining, proving or applying. One way to make this transition to the homiletical idea is by subjecting the exegetical idea to three questions: (1) What does this mean? (2) Is it true? (3) What difference does it make?[32] It might even be helpful to picture in your mind some member of your congregation shouting

---

[29] Paul Windsor, "Four Horizons in Preaching," *Review and Expositor* 21, no. 3 (July 1997): 227.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 79.

[32] Ibid., 79-96.

out one or more of those questions from the pew. If the question is, "What does this mean?" then your development of the homiletical idea will be an explanation of the exegetical idea. Perhaps the concepts of the Biblical writer do not relate to your contemporary audience, they need to be explained. Take for example, Paul's treatment of "meat offered to idols" in 1 Corinthians 8:1-13. In order to preach this passage, the preacher will have to explain the ancient practice of sacrificing meat to idols and relate this practice to some modern equivalent in order to make application to his contemporary audience.

If the question is, "Is it true?" then the development of the homiletical idea will involve proving that the statement is true. Take for example, the 1 Corinthians 13 passage on "The Supremacy of Love over Spiritual Gifts." Paul sets out to prove this truth with example after example of the emptiness of spirituality when it is divorced from love. Taking our cue from Paul, we could preach the sermon illustrating it with contemporary proofs of the supremacy of love.

If the question is, "What difference does it make?" then the development of the homiletical idea will set out to apply this truth to lives of your audience. In the "meat offered to idols" passage of 1 Corinthians 8, the homiletical idea may emerge as, "Christian Living When the Options are not Black and White." This sermon would see the "meat offered to idols as "gray areas" that even contemporary Christians contend with, but the application is to show love and deference to those who are less mature spiritually.

Developing this homiletical idea grows directly out of studying the context of the passage carefully and discerning first what the author's purpose was in including this passage. Sometimes this offers the key place to begin in formulating the homiletical idea. If

the writer of Scripture was intent on explaining, proving or applying a particular theological concept or doctrine, then that should be the starting point for deciding how the passage should be treated by the preacher.

Once these questions have probed the exegetical idea, the next step is to formulate the homiletical idea in such a way that it communicates the truth of the passage in a clear and revealing way. The homiletical idea should cause the listeners to want to hear what God has to say to them. If the homiletical idea can be framed in colorful or compelling language, then the sermon will take on even greater clarity and enable the listeners to immediately connect with the sermon. Craddock makes a good point here. He suggests that while thinking about the theme of the sermon, we should imagine how the announcement of that theme will affect our audience. "Do any eyes brighten, does any nerve twitch, does anyone lean forward in anticipation? Does hostility flash, are arms folded across the chest in defiance, or do spirits visibly sink into tolerance and resignation?"[33] Robinson uses a colorful example on his treatment of Romans 2:1-29, "Those using the law as their ladder to heaven will be left standing in hell."[34] The more interesting and intriguing the homiletical idea, the more impact it delivers.

Determining the Purpose of the Sermon

The next step in the development of expository sermon is to determine what purpose this sermon will serve. That purpose should flow directly from the purpose the

---

[33]Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 183.

[34]Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 98.

writer had in mind when writing the passage and ultimately the purpose the Holy Spirit had in mind when He inspired the passage.[35] The determination of the purpose should begin early enough in sermon preparation to allow all the material acquired for use in the sermon to move toward reaching that goal set forth in the purpose. Hall and Heflin suggest that this step is so vital that "upon it often hinges the success or failure of the sermon."[36] This purpose becomes a "controlling purpose" that directs the preacher through preparation and presentation to achieve some goal and each part of the message should be directed toward achieving this purpose. Hall and Heflin have identified four categories of intent: "to inform, to stimulate, to convince, and to persuade."[37] There may be other intents possible, but these cover a broad range of possible sermon intents.

When developing the purpose for a sermon, it seems helpful to ask, "What does this passage have to say to my people?" Do I want them to learn some new spiritual truth? Do I want them to change their attitude or their behavior? Do I want them to become a Christian, or develop spiritual maturity? Do I want them to become soul winners, or answer the call to vocational Christian ministry? There is a danger in failing to think through this step carefully. As Hall and Heflin conclude, "Without a specific objective in mind, the preacher risks aimlessness in his preaching."[38] Jay Adams suggests that "purpose is the central issue: the preacher's purpose in preaching, the purpose of the text, the purpose of the

---

[35] Ibid., 109.

[36] E. Eugene Hall and James L. Heflin, *Proclaim the Word!* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1985), 111.

[37] Ibid.

sermon content, of the organization, of the style, of the illustrative materials, of the type of delivery used – all of these and much more are crucial to good preaching."[39]

The purpose that is set forth in the Scripture passage is the first place to begin, but determining the purpose does not end there. Some passages are written with a number of purposes in mind. Take for example a sermon on the life of the prophet Jonah. The book of Jonah is a narrative account that has many life lessons. A sermon can be preached on the folly of running from God or how God has a way of accomplishing His purpose even when men resist. The original purpose of the whole book of Jonah may differ from individual parts of the book and there may in fact be multiple layers of purpose in any given passage. The key to determining the purpose of the sermon is found in both the exegesis of the text and the exegesis of your contemporary audience. We should be asking, "What is it that God has said here, that my people need to hear and having heard it, what should they do with it?"

The purpose of the sermon becomes a driving force in the development of the sermon and ultimately leads toward the shape of the outline of the sermon which will be discussed in the next section. Jay Adams argues that you are not ready to preach a sermon until you can state in one clear sentence the purpose of your sermon.[40] Robinson suggests that the development of the purpose can be carried out in a variety of ways, including: "an idea to be explained, a proposition to be proved, a principle to be applied, a subject to be

---

[38] Ibid.

[39] Adams, *Preaching with Purpose*, 2-3.

[40] Ibid., 31.

completed, and a story to be told."[41] Doctrinal sermons are often treated as "an idea to be explained." The doctrine is announced and the sermon develops as an explanation of the doctrine. The sermon may be treating a particularly difficult issue, such as the doctrine of election. In that case the purpose that drives the sermon could be "a proposition to be proved." The Bible is filled with passages that teach "a principle to be applied." For example, Jesus was confronted with a teacher of the law who asked him, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus asked him what the Law said. He replied that the law teaches that we should love God and love our neighbor. Jesus commended him. And the lawyer came back with the question, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus responded with the parable of the Good Samaritan, a brilliant "sermon" which is "a principle to be applied" as well as a "story to be told." A sermon which incorporates the "subject to be completed" begins with a subject or theme and moves toward a conclusion that may be an explanation, a proposition or an application. I am particularly fond of this approach because it leaves some element of mystery in the sermon that compels the audience to keep on listening because the answer is not fully provided until the end of the sermon. This approach can be developed inductively rather than deductively so that the audience arrives at the conclusion of the sermon along with the preacher and therefore discovers the truth in the process, rather than being told up front authoritatively what they should believe. I will be arguing later in this thesis that this approach has particular merit in reaching postmoderns.

It is at this point in the sermon development process that the issue of applications should arise. Hershael York and Scott Blue took up the issue of applications in

---

[41] Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 116-125.

their article, "Is Application Necessary in the Expository Sermon." Other voices that range from Karl Barth to John MacArthur suggest that applications are unnecessary or even impossible.[42] However, they conclude that these five elements should be included in the applications of expository sermons:

> (1) The application must be based on the truths that have been gleaned from the historical-grammatical-literary exegesis of the text. (2) The application must be based on the author's intended purpose of the text. (3) The application must explain the relevance of the Biblical truths that have been presented. (4) The application must include practical examples that the listener can then relate to their own life situations. (5) The application must persuade listeners to conform their lives to the Biblical truths presented and encourage them and perhaps even warn them of the negative consequences if they fail to do so.[43]

The application of the passage will normally follow from the purpose of the sermon. If the purpose of the sermon is teach some truth, the application is to understand that truth. If the purpose is to prove, then the application is to believe it. If the purpose is to change attitudes or behavior, then the application is to make those specific changes in attitude and behavior. Applications need to be specific. They should not be so vague that the church members say to themselves, "He's certainly not talking about me!" They should hear the application as an appeal to their individual heart.

---

[42] Hershael W. York and Scott A. Blue, "Is Application Necessary in the Expository Sermon?" *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 3, no. 2 (summer 1999): 70-71. Karl Barth, with his transcendent view of God questioned whether application is truly possible, while John MacArthur suggested that if the Word of God is faithfully proclaimed, the application will clearly emerge from the text without the preacher having to make a conscious effort to make a particular application.

[43] Ibid., 73.

Developing the Sermon Outline

The sermon outline takes all the accumulated data and observations and pulls them together in a fashion that compels the listener to hear the message and calls them to respond in some way. Robinson suggests that the sermon outline "provides a sermon with a sense of order, unity, and progress."[44] This sense of order and unity both serves to aid the preacher in delivery and the audience in comprehension of the message. Robinson has laid out four purposes for the sermon outline:

> First, it clarifies in the speaker's eye and mind the relationship between the parts of the sermon. Second, the speaker views his sermon as a whole and thereby heightens his sense of unity. An outline also crystallizes the order of ideas so that the listener will be given them in the appropriate sequence. Finally, the preacher recognizes the places in the outline requiring additional supporting material to develop his points.[45]

One of the most tried and true techniques for outlining the individual main points is: Exposition, Illustration and Application. If the main point can be thoroughly explained, well illustrated and applied, then the preacher has accomplished three essential elements that should be developed in the text itself as well.

Though this has been a staple in Seminary classrooms for years, it should be noted, as Bryan Chapell has pointed out that these are not hard and fast rules. Sometimes the best way to explain something is to illustrate it, sometimes the best way to illustrate is to apply and some of the best applications are thorough explanations.[46] Chapell goes on to

---

[44] Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 128.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Bryan Chapell, "Components of Expository Preaching," *Preaching* 10, no. 6 (May-June 1995): 8.

point out insightfully, that "explanations prepare the mind, illustrations prepare the heart, and applications prepare the will to obey."[47] He argues that a sermon should have a balance of these three, so that the sermon is not dominated by one to the detriment of the other. For example, a sermon dominated by illustrations might be viewed by some as strictly for entertainment; however, a sermon dominated by exposition might appear to reach the head but miss the heart and the will.

One technique that I think is particularly insightful is offered by Dr. Erwin Lutzer. He suggests that having begun with a propositional statement; the preacher develops a transitional sentence which includes a "key word" that is used to develop each of the main points of the sermon. The "key word" should be a "plural noun." For example, if the sermon is on a particular doctrine, the "key word" might be "aspects" or "elements." If the sermon is developing an application of a principle, the "key word" might be "steps" or "ways." Obviously this "key word" should be specific and carry some sort of force. The key word "things" is far too vague, but many of us have heard sermons in which the preacher announced that he was going to tell us "three things about this text."

The other concept, which Dr. Lutzer brings to this subject, is "parallelism." In other words, if a sermon has three points, or ten, they should in some way be parallel. As for whether they should be alliterated, the opinions on alliteration run far and wide. Some reject all forms of alliteration because they may lead the preacher to teach something that is not in the text. That is certainly a caution worth keeping in mind. On the other hand, alliteration can be a useful tool to aid in remembering the whole sermon and all of its parts.

---

[47] Ibid., 10.

Taken together these two principles, the "key word" and "parallelism" provide some great tools for simplifying sermon outlining, while at the same time providing a structure that is appealing and interesting to the audience. As Dr. Lutzer says, "When I begin a sermon by saying I will be showing them four truths, or three reasons, using some key word, the people begin grabbing their pens and paper to take notes." There is something about an organizing word like this that compels the audience to listen and even to write down what they are hearing. An example of this kind of development can be seen in this outline for a sermon on the inspiration of Scripture based on 2 Timothy 3:15-17.

In this passage, we see three *reasons* for inspiration:

1. God had a Message Worth *Preserving* – 2 Timothy 3:15, "from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation…" That's a message worth preserving.

2. God had a Message Worth *Proclaiming* – 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness." God's message is worth proclaiming. It is profitable.

3. God had a Message Worth *Possessing* – 2 Timothy 3:17, "that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." Like a workman who needs his tools, the Word of God is a message worth possessing.

Obviously, there is more work to be done. For example, I would want to explain the meaning of the word "inspiration" from the Greek *theopneustos*, that "God breathed" and I would want to explain revelation in more detail. I would also want to develop each of these points with fuller explanations and use illustrations and applications to fill out the details of the sermon. What I am pointing out with this example, is the use of the "key word" and "parallelism" as very helpful tools in the sermon outlining process.

The sermon outline is not complete when the proposition, transitional sentence, "key word" and "parallel" main points have been determined. The sermon outline must be filled in with fuller explanations, illustrations, applications and other supportive material. Parallel passages of Scripture, narratives from other texts and a whole host of additional materials fill out the sermon outline giving it both depth and breadth. In addition to these elements, the introduction and conclusion must be developed. I have more to say on these elements, but I will give these components a fuller treatment in the following chapter.

Before moving on, we will examine some objections to expository preaching and demonstrate that it meets the demand for reaching postmoderns and remaining faithful to the Biblical text.

Objections to Expository Preaching

I have tried to give a fairly extensive explanation of expository preaching because I am arguing that this method of preaching is far superior to other approaches. Nevertheless, I am aware that expository preaching has come under attack in recent years. In light of the shift toward postmodernity, let us examine some of the criticisms and provide a defense of the expository method.

David Hilborn has written a book critical of expository preaching in which he lists four critiques. First, he says that expository preaching is "rationalistic," that it is a purely cerebral discipline that harkens back to Enlightenment modernity and fails to meet the emotive needs of postmoderns. Second, he argues that expository preaching is "elitist," that it leaves out at least 95 percent of the world's population because it requires a concentration span and linear logic that few possess. Third, he claims it is "authoritarian," that

postmoderns who have an aversion to authority will not respond to a didactic monologue that smacks of an assertion of power. And fourth, he argues that expository preaching is "unbiblical," suggesting that expository preaching is not even employed by the human authors of Scripture or the characters in their narratives.[48] These are scathing criticisms, but can they stand up?

If by rationalistic, Hilborn is suggesting that expository preachers communicate truth through reason or logic, then his criticism is well-founded, but we have argued that expository preaching is firmly entrenched in the revelation of Scripture. The Biblical authors have communicated what they have heard, what they have seen with their eyes, what they have beheld and their hands handled.[49] In other words, the Bible communicates objectively and expository preaching seeks to explain what the authors have communicated to their audience which includes the contemporary audience.

Hilborn's claim that expository preaching is elitist sounds suspiciously like the attitude of some educators who have systematically "dumbed down" curriculum to meet the growing crisis in education. The church has always considered education an important part of ministry. In fact, most of our American universities began as institutions for training ministers and many of our American schools were started with the intention of teaching children to read so that they could read the Bible. To abandon exposition merely because it requires a sharper mind to understand complex theological truth can be compared to the

---

[48] Clements, "Expository Preaching," 175-76.

[49] 1 John 1:1.

practice during the middle ages of locking up the Scriptures behind bars and keeping the Bible out of the hands of the common people.[50] The same argument holds for Hilborn's claim that expository preaching is authoritarian. If by that we are to avoid saying, "Thus saith the Lord," then preaching will be reduced to some form of psychology or the opinions of an individual, rather than the revelation of God. If by authoritarian, Hilborn suggests that preachers should avoid dogmatism, I heartily agree. Dogmatism is as distasteful to most expositors as it is to postmoderns.

With regard to Hilborn's claim that expository preaching is unbiblical, we need only examine the Bible to find that there is ample evidence that expository preaching, at least as we have defined it, is practiced throughout the Scriptures. Let me provide a few examples. In Deuteronomy 4, Moses preaches an expository sermon on a "call to obedience." He cites the Law given by God and explains what God has said using examples, illustrations and applications for his audience. Anyone who reads the five books of Moses can readily see that Moses is an exemplar of expository preaching. This does not suggest that he avoids narrative. Clearly the book of Genesis and the Exodus experience are replete with narratives, but even these narratives serve to expound the nature of God and God's plan for the nation of Israel.

Assuming that the "Word of the Lord" represents the starting point for prophetic messages of the Old Testament, it could be argued that the major and minor prophets contain examples of expository preaching. Isaiah 53 is an expository sermon on the substitutionary atonement of the "Suffering Servant," whom we recognize as Christ. Jonah

---

[50] Clements, "Expository Preaching," 177.

proclaimed an "expository sermon" to Nineveh, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4). Joel proclaimed the Word of Lord and presented an "expository sermon" on the eschatological judgment of God (Joel 2:1-32). Hosea proclaimed a "expository" message on God's loyal covenant love, with a summons to repentance and promise of restoration (Hosea 14:1-8). Many other examples abound, assuming we accept the premise that God's Word to the prophets as a beginning point for the sermon represents a parallel to our beginning the sermon with the Scriptural text.[51]

In the New Testament, while a great deal of material is narrative in nature, it is also filled with examples of exposition. For example, in Matthew 5-7, Jesus preaches the "Sermon on the Mount" and clearly utilizes the tools of exposition. His practice there was to take an Old Testament law or teaching and explain it, illustrate it and apply it to the lives of His hearers. The epistles are also replete with exposition. The book of Hebrews is a masterful example of what is probably intended as a complete expository sermon. The writer of Hebrews quotes Old Testament passages, explains them, illustrates them and applies them to his contemporary audience.

One of the important elements of expository preaching that is often overlooked is its attention to literary genre. If the criticism toward expository preaching suggests that all expository sermons are didactic, propositional lectures that ignore the narrative, parable, apocalyptic or poetic form of the passage, then that criticism is really against a poorly conceived expository sermon. Expository preaching by its very definition

---

[51] C.f. David Larsen, *The Company of the Preachers: A History of Biblical Preaching from the Old Testament to the Modern Era* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 27-30.

utilizes the literary genre and finds its structure in the passage that is being examined. To suggest that expository preaching violates the literary genre, by turning poetry into lecture is to do violence to the meaning of expository preaching as well as to Scripture itself. As Clements writes, "the adjective 'expository' describes the method by which the preacher decides *what* to say, not *how* to say it."[52]

Postmodernists will no doubt raise other objections. For example, in the area of truth and reality, we have shown that postmodernist reject objective truth, the correspondence theory of truth and all absolutes. They posit instead that truth is subjective, "socially constructed" and deny any claims to absolute truth. Can expository preaching meet this challenge? The answer is both yes and no. The various literary genres of Scripture each exhibit certain characteristics that communicate truth in a variety of ways to different kinds of audiences. In fact, narrative, poetic, and parabolic material, have built-in elements which evoke emotion and invite the reader to enter into an experience with the text. Jesus used this technique often when He told parables. For example, the parable of the Good Samaritan is a remarkable teaching on "Who is my neighbor?" The reader or audience hears that story and relates themselves to the intended message. Is the parable objective or subjective? Clearly there are elements of both, but it is the subjective element that causes the reader to understand the message Jesus was communicating.

Narrative material has the same effect. The exodus narrative causes the reader to experience the tragedy and triumph of that oppressed nation and learns that God knows what they are going through and God cares. The 23rd Psalm is a wonderful piece of poetry

---

[52] Clements, "Expository Preaching," 178.

that evokes emotion and puts the reader in touch with a subjective response to God. One could preach these types of literature as didactic lecture and totally miss these emotional and subjective elements. However, that approach would not only do violence to the text, it would also inhibit God's purpose in communicating with that type of literature.

What about epistolary material, can this genre be preached to a postmodern audience who rejects objective truth and the correspondence theory of truth? Here again, the expository method has a strength which is often overlooked. Preaching the epistles requires that the expositor explore the context of the letter to determine the specific need being addressed or the circumstances that led to the writing of the letter. Sometimes this means that passages are understood as "culturally conditioned." For example, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians that a woman is to have her head covered while praying or prophesying (1 Corinthians 11:5). With only a little investigation, the exegete will discover that in the Corinthian context, the prostitutes were identified by lack of head gear. Paul wanted the women of the church to be distinct from their culture. In the same epistle, Paul writes that a woman is to keep silent in the church (1 Corinthians 14:34). Yet just three chapters before this, he told the women to cover their heads when they pray or prophesy in the church. Surely Paul wouldn't allow so blatant a contradiction in one letter. Again, a careful exegete would have determined that it was a common practice in Corinth for the men and women to sit on opposite sides of the church. That practice is still in effect among some religions today. What Paul was trying to avoid was the disorder that occurs when the women shout across the church to their husbands to ask a question. He says, "Let them ask their husbands at home" (1 Corinthians 14:35). Derrida and Foucault may criticize what appears to be the

oppression of women in these passages, but when explained carefully with an understanding of the cultural condition, these passages can speak to our culture. For example, I would suggest that rather than asking women to cover their head, it is appropriate to tell women that they should avoid wearing apparel that might indicate that they are a prostitute.

Expository preaching can meet the challenge of helping those who need subjective elements before they accept an objective proposition. It can utilize the Scripture's own built-in tools for helping a variety of different epistemological positions. I would further argue that it is the expository method that handles this objection more faithfully and successfully than any other method. The truth is, there is some merit in the postmodernists' definition of "socially constructed" truth and we must take that into consideration when explaining a text of Scripture. To do so with sensitivity and compassion is part of what it means to be a preacher.

Bearing in mind that expository preaching faces these and other new challenges in the postmodern context, I am arguing that expository preaching can be utilized effectively by preaching expository sermons with some modifications. Haddon Robinson himself acknowledged this fact in a recent interview for *Preaching*. He pointed out that "expository preaching is primarily a matter of sermon philosophy rather than sermon form. Expositors are not restricted to a homiletical strait jacket that is purely deductive."[53]

In the next chapter, we will thoroughly explore an approach to preaching expository sermons with the modifications necessary for connecting with postmoderns.

---

[53]David L. Allen, "A Tale of Two Roads: The New Homiletic and Biblical Authority," *Preaching* 18, no. 2 (September-October 2002): 36.

CHAPTER 5

PREACHING THAT CONNECTS WITH POSTMODERNS

The goal of this thesis from the beginning has been to determine the most effective means to reach out to postmoderns, to connect with them compellingly, and ultimately to bring the transforming message of the gospel to bear on their hearts and minds. We have noted that postmoderns have certain biases that present challenges to reaching them in traditional ways, but hope is not lost.

Research in communication theory and the cultural analysis of Leonard Sweet has provided some insight into approaches that connect with postmoderns. Since the 1960's researchers have studied the effect of communication on both sides of the brain and concluded that the left side of the brain is much more linear and the right side more non-verbal, spatial, emotional and image dependent.[1] This knowledge of the two sides of the brain has suggested that our preaching take into account both sides of the brain. A strictly cerebral sermon, especially in our day, leaves much to be desired.

Jim Somerville has done research in this area and concluded that when we preach we should not be preaching to one or the other side of the brain, but both. He suggests when preaching to the right brain we should use vivid language, metaphors, and

---

[1] Jim Somerville, "Preaching to the Right Brain," *Preaching* 10, no. 4 (Jan-Feb 1995): 36.

images. We should help our listeners move from one way of thinking to another, explore the unusual, and leave some things open ended.[2] In addition to brain research, we noted earlier that Leonard Sweet's cultural analysis has suggested that our preaching include elements that are "experiential, participatory, image-laden and connective."[3]

I have argued that expository preaching is the best method of preaching for ensuring faithfulness to the Word of God. I have also noted that postmodernism presents challenges to preaching that must be addressed if we are to achieve the desired impact of transformation. Taking into consideration the areas of weakness we noted in the deductive model, let us examine an approach that takes into consideration the challenge of postmodernism, research into communications, and Sweet's cultural analysis.

The Inductive Approach

There are basically two approaches for presenting ideas, whether in a sermon or any other type of discourse, the deductive approach and the inductive approach.[4] The deductive approach begins by stating a proposition or truth and then proceeds to explain, illustrate and apply that truth. This approach is rather traditional and probably one of the easiest ways to preach a sermon or teach a lesson. From a postmodern perspective, there are

---

[2]Ibid., 39.

[3]Leonard D. Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century World* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), xxi.

[4]Brian McLaren and Steve Rabey have argued for a third approach they call "abduction" which involves using a story that touches the senses in such a way that listeners are "abducted" by the truth. Since abduction fits very well into the scheme of the inductive approach, I have chosen to discuss this in the section on illustrations. c.f. Brian McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) and Steve Rabey, *In Search of Authentic Faith: How Emerging Generations are Transforming the Church* (Colorado Springs: Waterbook Press, 2001).

difficulties with this approach. The postmodern listener may feel that the preacher is assuming too much authority or worse just spouting his or her own opinions. They may respond, "Well that may be your truth, but I don't agree."

If the listener rejects the stated proposition, the sermon may fail before the preacher ever gets started. One could argue that preaching then becomes apologetic. State the proposition and then set out to prove it. Again from a postmodern perspective, this may fail if the postmodern listener rejects the logic of your arguments or simply believes that truth is so relative that they will stand on their rejection of your proposition no matter what evidence you present.

The alternative is the inductive approach. The inductive approach, rather than beginning with a stated proposition, begins where the audience is and works toward the proposition which may or may not be stated at the end of the sermon. In a sense, the inductive approach is an upside down version of the didactic approach. By advocating an inductive approach, I am not suggesting this as an alternative to expository preaching. It is more of a complement to the expository method. Even Haddon Robinson, considered by many the "dean" of evangelical homileticians, noted that good expository preaching can be arranged "deductively, semi-inductively or inductively."[5]

Fred Craddock has made a strong case for inductive preaching in his book entitled, *As One Without Authority*, where he suggests that our civilization has changed over

---

[5]Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 125-127. c.f. David L. Allen, "A Tale of Two Roads: The New Homiletic and Biblical Authority," *Preaching* 18, no. 2 (September-October 2002): 36.

the years from a predominately oral society to a literal society and now to an aural society.[6] He explains that our culture once learned primarily by sharing oral traditions that were passed down from person to person. Then with the advent of the printing press, we began to learn through reading the printed text. But today, with television and radio, our culture now hears a message that is mediated by mechanical devices that they are free to tune into or tune out. The average person in the pew probably misses his remote when the sermon becomes dry.

This pattern of socializing has made our society that much more impersonal. Gone are the days when families sat around a circle and listened to the stories of the elders. Now they sit together in front of a television screen or worse they sit alone in front of the television or computer screen. Sitting in a church with a group of people that may be strangers to them and listening to a minister who they may feel disconnected with, telling them things they ought to believe, seems stranger than ever in our day. The deductive pattern of preaching with its stated proposition front-loading the message invites the audience to tune out, not only because they reject the proposition, but also because that is not the way they receive information.

Think of it this way. Suppose I told the punch line of a joke and then went on to explain the joke. No one tells a joke that way. Or suppose I tell the moral of the story and

---

[6]Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, (Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1971), 10. There is much in Craddock's treatment of inductive preaching that I find helpful; however, I have not accepted some of his hermeneutical inclinations. Some have taken the view that Craddock rejects the authority of Scripture and there may be some warrant for reading him that way. I support the view that the Scripture is already authoritative, but the methodology we use to proclaim it may in fact help those who reject its authority to ultimately accept its authority and believe it.

then set out to tell the story. Whether you agree with the moral or not, who would want to hear a story that way? Our listeners have grown up on movies and television shows that invite the viewers to experience the story by building drama and excitement up to the very end, leaving the audience with a sense that they have experienced the story themselves. Most people love a mystery which needs to be solved. Television producers and movie directors build the drama of a story in such a way that the audience tries to solve the mystery and guess at the conclusion all along the way. If the writers told the end of the story at the beginning, some viewers might watch, but most would tune it out. Who hasn't been thoroughly disgusted with a friend who told them the ending to a movie before they had a chance to see it? What a tragedy it is that preachers are so often guilty of boring their listeners by telling them "whodunit" too early in the process.

Fred Craddock offers this cogent illustration contrasting the two approaches:

> Watch an old man peal an apple for his grandson. Forget the sanitation problems and watch the deliberate care in beginning, the slow curl of unbroken peel, the methodical removing of the core. The boy's eyes enlarge, his saliva flows, he urges more speed, he is at the point of pouncing upon grandfather and seizing the apple. Then it is given to him, and it is the best apple in the world. Place beside that small drama a sermon that gives its conclusion, breaks it into points and applications, and one senses the immensity of the preacher's crime against the normal currents of life.[7]

Ralph and Gregg Lewis, in their book *Inductive Preaching*, suggest that the key to inductive preaching is "getting listeners involved in the sermon."[8] They point out that all of us have experienced that shift in our audience when we tell a story. The eyes light up,

---

[7]Ibid., 63.

[8]Ralph L. Lewis with Gregg Lewis, *Inductive Preaching: Helping People Listen* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1983), 36.

the dozing wake up, and everyone becomes more attentive. We have all learned the value of illustrations. As Spurgeon said illustrations are the windows that let light into our sermons.[9] This truth has tempted many a preacher to preach what Chuck Swindoll called "skyscraper sermons," one story on top of another. No doubt that approach may be appealing to some audiences, but it may leave them with a rather weak diet, milk rather than meat.

The approach Ralph and Gregg Lewis advocate is an inductive approach that involves the audience in much the same way that illustrations involve the listeners. "An inductive sermon is one that starts where the people are, with particular elements—the narrative, dialogue, analogy, questions, parables, the concrete experiences—and then leads to general conclusions."[10] Rather than stating the conclusions at the beginning, the preacher builds the excitement of the truth he is teaching, involving the listeners in the process until both arrive at the conclusion together. This approach meets a critical need in postmoderns. They tend to reject authority and absolutes, fearing that the opinions of others may be biased by power structures. Inductive preaching allows them to arrive at the truth without feeling that some proposition has been imposed upon them from an authority figure.

This does not mean that preacher should abdicate authority, as many feel Craddock has advocated in his inductive approach.[11] Rather, the approach I am defending requires a strong view of authority in Scripture and reliance on the Holy Spirit. The preacher who uses this approach, rather than stating a truth he must defend or prove, demonstrates the

---

[9] C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), 349.

[10] Lewis and Lewis, *Inductive Preaching*, 43.

[11] Ibid., 45.

defense and proof of his central thesis throughout the sermon so that the listeners arrive at his central thesis as if it were their own. As Ralph and Gregg Lewis point out, "a sermon can be factually correct, homiletically sound, Biblically accurate, doctrinally orthodox and still achieve nothing because it fails to involve the listeners. Involvement is the key. And listener involvement is the strength of the inductive process in preaching."[12]

Contrasting the Deductive and Inductive Approaches

The inductive approach is not a replacement for expository preaching. I am arguing that expository preaching can be done in an inductive fashion which preserves all of the strengths of expository preaching while avoiding some of its weaknesses. In light of the challenge presented by postmodernism, an inductive approach to expository preaching offers the greatest promise for meeting the challenge and reaching the postmoderns in our pews.

Ralph and Gregg Lewis have presented some insightful contrasts between the deductive and inductive process that I think represent clear indications that the inductive approach is a superior method of sermon construction and delivery, especially in light of the shift of postmodernity.[13] In deductive sermons, the preacher begins with generalizations, assertions and propositions. In inductive sermons, the preacher begins with the particulars that lead to the conclusions or propositions and delay the assertions until the audience has come to the same conclusions.[14] For the postmodern listener, this allows time for processing

---

[12]Ibid., 165.

[13]Ibid., 119.

[14]Ibid.

the truth and sensing that they are involved in the process rather than feeling that truth is being crammed down their throat. In the deductive sermon, the preacher begins where the speaker is, not necessarily where the listener is; while in the inductive sermon, the preacher begins where the listener is.[15] This means that the preacher will have to determine the contemporary need that the text addresses. It does not suggest that the preacher discovers a need and then searches the Bible for a solution. That can lead to proof-texting. In deductive preaching, there may be an air of personal prejudice; while in the inductive sermon, the preacher allows the facts and particulars of life to speak for themselves.[16] We have pointed out that postmoderns reject "metanarratives." In fact, they reject the Christian "metanarrative." The inductive approach offers the postmodern listener an opportunity to enter into the Biblical narrative and claim it as their own.[17] What before may have seemed like an incursive narrative may become for them part of their own story. This is certainly part of what it means to become a Christian, the Biblical story of paradise lost and paradise regained becomes our own story.

Sometimes the deductive approach gives unwanted or unwarranted advice before any common ground is established, but in the inductive approach, the preacher saves the advice until the listener has arrived at the same conclusions the preacher actually held

---

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Middleton and Walsh point out that the Bible is the "ultimate metanarrative," but the Biblical metanarrative is different from other metanarratives. The Biblical metanarrative seeks to show a way out of suffering and disenfranchisement; it seeks to invite others into its story rather than exclude them. J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than it Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1995), 83.

from the beginning.[18] Since postmoderns believe that truth is "subjective," they are more apt to go on a journey in discovery of truth than they are to accept that the preacher's truth is automatically their truth. The inductive approach does not abdicate authority. It helps to uphold the authority of the Bible by allowing the Bible to speak for itself. Conservatives have had a tendency to go to great lengths to prove that the Bible is inerrant or authoritative. When in fact, our defensive posture has sometimes sent the wrong message; that it is so weak it needs our help.

The deductive approach comes off as authoritarian and sometimes assumes an adversarial posture; while the inductive approach achieves authority and proceeds in a non-adversarial posture.[19] Inductive preaching shares the experience and the process so that the listener is not in a sparring match with the preacher who must prove his point. This does not suggest that inductive preaching is not persuasive preaching. Quite the contrary, an inductive sermon can be very persuasive. If the fruits of our exegesis produce evidence to support our central claim, then let that evidence be presented first so that the conclusion becomes as obvious to our listeners as it was to us in the study.

Deductive preaching is often rational rather than relational; while the inductive approach is more relational than rational.[20] Postmoderns who have rejected modernistic rationalism will appreciate a relational approach that is more holistic and takes into consideration their heart as well as their head. The deductive approach can be irrelevant,

---

[18] Lewis and Lewis, *Inductive Preaching*, 119.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

show a lack of respect for hearers, and subject-centered rather than person-centered. The inductive approach, on the other hand, relates to real life and human experiences, it respects the opinions of the hearers, and focuses on the human needs of the hearers at a personal level.[21] Someone may argue that these characterizations of the deductive approach are straw men arguments, that these are problems that can be overcome by any skilled expositor. The issue may not be whether an expository preacher holds any of these biases, such as authoritarianism. The issue is that the approach itself has a tendency to send off these signals whether the preacher holds these attitudes or not.

Objections to the Inductive Approach

We have argued that the inductive approach retains the strengths of expository preaching, while avoiding the weakness of shutting the minds of postmoderns from the opening words of the sermon. However, it may be helpful at this point to raise some possible objections to this approach in order to understand how it meets the challenge of postmodernism. Craddock raises and answers four possible objections that I would like to highlight.[22] First, the inductive approach raises the possibility that preachers will become lazy in their approach to study. If the proposition can be saved for last, or the audience completes the sermon, then perhaps the preacher could stand up announce the text and perform exegesis right before their eyes. There are some preachers who do this now and call it expository preaching. As we have pointed out earlier, a running commentary of the text is

---

[21] Ibid.

[22] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 66-73.

not expository preaching and this is certainly not what we have in mind for inductive preaching. Studying the text thoroughly and even arriving at the central idea or "big idea" is still a necessity. This is no lazy approach. In fact, it requires a great deal of study and creativity.

A second possible objection is the charge that inductive preaching may be unethical. There is always the possibility that the preacher may want to "trick" his audience into accepting his ideas about a particular text by stacking the deck in advance. The truth is this caution concerning ethics is an issue for every type of sermon. The goal of inductive preaching is not to trick a listener into being convinced, it is to involve the listener in the process of discovering what God has already provided for us through revelation.

A third objection that has been raised suggests that this approach may open the door to subjectivism, or the view that the truth is only established existentially when the listener hears the message and arrives at their own private interpretation. Even before Bultmann and Barth, this was a possibility and certainly we have to move with caution in light of the "New Hermeneutic," but this objection could be raised against other approaches to preaching. It is a caution that every preacher must take into consideration, especially in light of the shift of postmodernity. This objection raises the prospect that preachers must be intentional in establishing in their own mind the veracity of Scripture and preach with authority. Inductive preaching does not relinquish the authority of the text. It allows the text to speak powerfully into the hearts and minds of the listeners so much so that some will feel they are hearing from God in a way they have never experienced before.

That being said, there are problems with the "New Hermeneutic" and its kin the "New Homiletic" and a number of conservative authors have pointed out the problems they raise.[23] One of the tenets that have emerged in the "New Homiletic" is a view that truth is somehow discovered in the minds of the audience. A critical reading of that statement suggests that truth "comes into being" at the intersection of the audience and the message. However, a less critical approach and the view that I hold suggests that the audience comes to understand and believe the truth through the process of proclamation. I am not suggesting that the word of God is not true until they believe it. I am saying that it is already true and our role as preachers is to help them believe it and understand it. The reason I have chosen to explain and defend expository preaching before inductive preaching is to combat this very idea. One need not relinquish the authority of Scripture in order to embrace an inductive approach to proclamation.

The fourth objection Craddock raises is a practical one. Will this approach effect change? We all like to think that our sermons produce results. We would like leave a worship service sensing that we have proved our point and lives will be transformed as a result. The truth is, even with the deductive approach, there is the possibility that even if we prove our point incontrovertibly, there will still be members of our congregation that will walk away saying, "So what!" There is a subtle secondary question involved here. Can inductive preaching call for a response? If the deductive message begins, "This is the truth, now I shall prove it," then the inductive message begins, "let us see what this text teaches."

---

[23] David L. Allen, "Preaching and Postmodernism: An Evangelical Comes to the Dance," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 5, no. 2 (summer 2001): 64.

The call for a decision, whether explicitly stated or not, stands at the end of both types of messages and whether the sermon proceeds inductively or deductively, a response is called for by the message.

Roy Clements raises another possible objection. In our discussion of expository preaching, we pointed out that some have discarded the expository approach because of a poor understanding of the approach, as well as the violence that has been done in the hands of some poor practitioners. The same could be said for inductive preaching. Clements is critical of what he calls, "Mental-Arithmetic" sermons, which is a sermon which presents a good application, but fails to show the work that was done to arrive at the result.[24] Like a math student who gets the right answer, but fails to show his work. This is a caricature of the inductive approach. The fruits of the exegesis, not the entire process of exegesis, do come into the sermon in the same way that they do in a didactic expository sermon. The development of the key idea is "exposed" in inductive preaching the same way it is exposed in the deductive approach, only in reverse order. Rather than beginning with the conclusions drawn from exegesis, those conclusions are led up to throughout the sermon.

Some might argue that the approach is not Biblical. Ralph and Gregg Lewis point out that God's method of communication is more in line with the inductive approach than the deductive approach. They write that God "doesn't start His Bible message by saying, 'I'm going to prove my loving faithfulness by presenting the world with a means of salvation from sin and death.' Instead, God begins by recounting his specific acts in history

---

[24] Roy Clements, "Expository Preaching in a Postmodern World," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 23, no. 2 (April 1999): 180.

and tries to sustain their intensity in ever-increasing scope."[25] Any careful reading of Scripture would sustain this argument. God's revelation is progressive. We learn more and more about God's redemptive plan over time and through narrative material, and ultimately through the life and teachings of Jesus.

Think of the approach used in many of the New Testament books. In both the Gospel of John and the first epistle of John, the apostle saves his theme until the very end. The theme of the Gospel of John is found in John 20:30-31, "Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name." And in 1 John, the apostle saves his theme until 1 John 5:13, "These things have been written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life." It is certainly helpful to turn to the end of these books and find the theme as we preach them, but John didn't write his books that way.

No respectable reader picks up a novel and reads the last chapter first, that would spoil the book. In the same way, Biblical authors often tell us their theme, but save the great truths for telling along the way. Paul does this in his books. He may raise the issue, as he does in 1 Corinthians, by pointing out a problem or a question that has been raised, and then he moves through the book toward the answer or solution. In the book of Romans, Paul gives his theme in Romans 1:16-17, by stating that he is not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God unto salvation and in it the righteousness of God is revealed. He spends

---

[25] Lewis and Lewis, *Inductive Preaching*, 61.

the bulk of that great book explaining that theme, but he doesn't give the whole answer in propositional form at the beginning. The book develops from that central theme so that his readers must read to the very end to hear the entire scope of his message. In the same way the inductive approach allows the listener to move through the sermon, seeing what the preacher sees, examining the same issues, hearing the narratives and illustrations and finally arriving with the preacher at the central proposition.

Integrating the Expository Sermon with the Inductive Approach

In the previous chapter, we argued that the expository method of preaching is superior to other preaching models because it preserves Biblical truth and avoids the danger of proof-texting or eisegesis. We have also argued that it is extremely versatile and can be used very effectively with every literary genre and a wide variety of delivery approaches. In this chapter, we have suggested that the inductive approach is a superior pattern for delivery to a postmodern audience. The question is: Can they be integrated effectively? Haddon Robinson has included in his book *Expository Preaching*, a section on the inductive arrangement. He wrote, "Inductive sermons produce a sense of discovery in listeners, as though they arrived at the idea on their own. Induction is particularly effective with indifferent or hostile audiences likely to reject a preacher's proposition were it presented early in the sermon."[26] This is exactly what we have been arguing. If any audience is likely to be "indifferent or hostile" it is the postmodern in the pew.

---

[26]Robinson, *Expository Preaching*, 125-127.

John A. Broadus, in his book entitled, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, includes the inductive argument as a key form of sermon development. He wrote that "Induction is, in popular usage, the most common form of argument."[27] In fact, Robinson suggests sixteen sermon patterns and all but one of them are inductive arrangements.[28] We will look at some of his suggested patterns in the section on outlining the sermon. What we have said previously about preparing an expository sermon still applies to the inductive approach. The preparation process should include as a minimum: (1) Selecting the passage, (2) Developing the Exegetical Idea, (3) Formulating the Homiletical Idea, (4) Determining the Sermon's Purpose, and (5) Outlining the Sermon. In order to convert a standard expository sermon into one that is integrated with the inductive approach, we need only make a few minor alterations which we will discuss below.

Introducing the Sermon

It should go without saying that the introduction of the sermon should introduce the sermon. That certainly seems obvious, but I have heard many sermons where the introduction was a sermon in itself or where the content of the introduction had nothing to do with the sermon. We have probably all heard a preacher say, "Let me just say a few things before I preach." That phrase alone sends the signal that what he is about to say has either nothing to do with the sermon, or worse, it warns us that the sermon will not in fact be saying anything at all.

---

[27] John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 4th ed. rev. Vernon L. Stanfield (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), 149.

[28] Ibid., 68-74.

In point of fact, the introduction should gain the attention of the listeners and introduce the subject of the sermon. Larsen tells the story of a farmer who sold his mule to a neighbor and told him the mule would work if you speak sweetly to him. The farmer came back a while later and complained that he had tried speaking nicely and the mule still would not work. The farmer promptly took a stick and hit the mule between the eyes. The mule staggered a bit and then began to plow. The farmer was perplexed, "I thought you said to speak sweetly to the mule." The neighbor replied, "It doesn't do any good to talk to him until you get his attention."[29] I am certainly not suggesting that we beat our people over the head with a stick, but a powerful sermon needs an introduction that gains the attention of the audience so that they open up their ears and hearts to hear the message and become involved in the sermon.

Mark Galli and Craig Larson have written a book entitled, *Preaching That Connects: Using the Techniques of Journalists to Add Impact to Your Sermons*. Their title clearly demonstrates their thesis, that we can learn a lot about preaching from observing the way journalists write articles. In their chapter on introductions, they wrote,

> A good introduction arrests me. It handcuffs me and drags me before the sermon, where I stand and hear a Word that makes me both tremble and rejoice. When all is said and done, I walk away from such a sermon in thankful amazement, wondering, How did that happen?[30]

---

[29]David L. Larsen, *Telling the Old Old Story: The Art of Narrative Preaching* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1995), 112.

[30]Mark Galli and Craig Brian Larson, *Preaching That Connects: Using the Techniques of Journalists to Add Impact to Your Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 35.

They suggest that good introductions have three elements, "the opening sentence, the development, and the transition."[31] The opening sentence, they suggest must be arresting and powerful. Like a journalist, who must get the attention of his readers in that first sentence; in the same way the preacher must get their listener's attention in that first sentence. That first sentence might be question, a quote, an illustration, a concept or the beginning of a story, but it must captivate the audience so that they will want to listen to what you have to say.

In a deductive sermon, the introduction states the proposition, but as we have pointed out, the inductive sermon saves the proposition for the end where it is either stated or strongly implied. In the inductive sermon, the preacher introduces one or more particulars that will begin the process of building toward generalities. The particular may be an illustration, example or a narrative. Dr. Paul Feinberg began a sermon on the Providence of God, by telling a fictional story of a poor woman coming to a market to buy food for her family of five. She noticed that the sparrows were on sale, two sparrows for a cent. She tried to barter with "Levi" and finally talked him into throwing in a fifth sparrow for free. His story was creative and captivating and perfectly set up the sermon for the Scripture reading from Luke 12:6, "Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? And yet not one of them is forgotten by God." In the sermon, he pointed out that God cares even about this sparrow that is thrown in for free.[32]

---

[31] Ibid., 36.

[32] Paul Feinberg, "The Fifth Sparrow," Trinity Evangelical Divinity School Chapel, Deerfield, Illinois, 30 October 2002.

The introduction must introduce what the sermon is about, but it need not be stated explicitly. In an inductive arrangement, crafting the initial particulars requires imagination and insight to avoid stating the obvious and yet bring the audience into the sermon. As Ralph and Gregg Lewis have pointed out, we are seeking to involve the audience in our sermon so that they become a part of it and seek to explore with us the issues we are bringing before them.

Stephenson Bond has written a book entitled, *Interactive Preaching,* in which he defends an approach to preaching that involves active interaction with the audience. He defines an interactive sermon as "any sermon that draws its text, its interpretation of Scripture, from the relational experience between the story of Scripture and the life context of the listener."[33] He goes on to describe an interactive sermon as one which involves the participation of the audience. He even suggests that the preacher step down from the pulpit and ask poignant questions allowing the audience to participate in the preaching process.[34] Leonard Sweet makes a similar suggestion calling on preaching to become more "karaoke," a chance for the audience to actually hold the microphone.[35] It is an intriguing idea and may be very effective perhaps on a Sunday evening or Wednesday evening service, but could be dangerous on a Sunday morning. I am sure that every preacher has a story about a spontaneous response to a rhetorical question that had quite an impact on the service and not always a pleasant one. What I think we can gain from his insight is the interaction that can

---

[33]D. Stephenson Bond, *Interactive Preaching* (St. Louis, Mo.: CPB Press, 1991), 5.

[34]Ibid., 29.

[35]Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims*, 73.

come from an appeal to audience response. This sometimes works well in the introduction to establish rapport. This might take the form of a show of hands or an actual verbal response that is called for *en chorus*. Many African-American churches do this very effectively with a real dialogue developing between the pulpit and the pew, but it may be difficult to pull this off as well in a predominately Caucasian church and may even be seen as distracting to some. The point is, the introduction should aim at involving the audience in the message in a way that makes them a part of the preaching process and not idle bystanders.

A critical issue at this juncture is: Where do we place the reading of the text? An inductive sermon is not a "textless" sermon. For it to be an expository sermon; there must be a text. There are a variety of options open to us. At the very minimum, I would suggest that the first words of the sermon ought not to be, "Turn with me in your Bibles to . . . ." That may invite the listener, especially the hostile or indifferent listener to shut us out completely. Instead, the text may be read or quoted from memory after the initial arresting story, question or quote. If we have the listener's attention and have drawn them into the sermon, it is natural to ask them to turn now to the Bible to see what God has to say about this subject.

I agree with Larsen here that the introduction to the sermon should not exceed 10-15 percent of the total sermon length.[36] Therefore, the reading of the text should still take place early on in delivery. Another option is to read the text after the first point or movement in the sermon. In this arrangement, the preacher gets the attention of his audience, states

---

[36]David L. Larsen, *The Anatomy of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 74.

implicitly or explicitly the theme of the message and begins the first movement of the sermon with particulars, examples or illustrations and then arrives at the text with a part of the sermon already in process.

As I have said, the options are almost endless. Fred Craddock includes in his book on inductive preaching a sample of one of his inductive sermons. It is quite imaginative, using the word "Doxology" as if it were an object that one either takes with him or leaves at home depending on whether he thinks it is useful for various circumstances. "Doxology" almost becomes an allegorical figure as in *Pilgrim's Progress*. Throughout the sermon, he realizes that "Doxology" is appropriate at family outings, at the bedside of a dying saint, at school, or on a sabbatical. On some of those occasions, he failed to bring "Doxology" along and realized later, he should have. Finally, at the end of the sermon, he reads his text from Romans 11:33-36, "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever. Amen."[37] It is an unusual approach that some preachers might find difficult to pull off, but it is possible to save the text for last. Regardless of where the text is read, the introduction must get the listener's attention, introduce the theme or subject, and then transition toward the first movement or point of the sermon.

Developing the Biblical Material

In the previous chapter, we have already pointed out the importance of thorough exegesis in developing the exegetical idea and formulating the homiletical idea, but here I want to point out some of nuances of taking the Biblical material to another level in

---

[37] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 163-168.

order to enhance the inductive appeal. Craddock suggests that one way of moving from exegesis to proclamation is by bringing the congregation along on a "re-creation" of the inductive experience the preacher has had in arriving at his understanding of the text.[38] He adds the corrective that of course this does not mean that we share all the technicalities of our search, or a sort of data dump of the various books and commentaries consulted. This approach accomplishes the goal of involving the audience in the sermon and it also serves to develop the Bible reading skills of our congregation. As Roy Clements has put it, "It is no longer enough to feed our people. These days we must also show them how to cook."[39]

Craddock has offered some very helpful suggestions for developing the Biblical material.[40] First, he suggests that we ought to let the text speak for itself initially and not commentaries or dictionaries. Second, he suggests we engage the text with lively questions and probe it from every possible angle examining all of its facets before arriving at our conclusions. Often, it is this stage of development that can invite the kinds of probing questions that will naturally become part of the inductive sermon during delivery. If we ask good questions of the text in our study, those questions may be the very ones our congregation will be asking and trying to answer during the sermon. He cautions that we avoid oversimplification, hasty conclusions and moralizing at this point.[41]

---

[38] Ibid., 125.

[39] Clements, "Expository Preaching," 181.

[40] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 134-49.

[41] Ibid., 134.

Craddock's third suggestion is that we "listen" to the text, to let it speak to us. The point here is we are often inclined to read a text with previous presuppositions, or half-baked theories, without actually focusing on what the text says. I have noticed that while searching the Bible for a parallel passage on a particular topic, some texts come to mind immediately as possible candidates, but upon further consideration they turn out to be poor candidates because they actually teach a completely different idea than I had previously surmised. Therefore, this careful "listening" to the text for what it actually teaches is critical.

Craddock goes on to suggest that we practice "overhearing" the text.[42] By this he means that we try to imagine that we are standing at the elbow of John or Paul as they write their message, asking ourselves those questions about the audience, the author's intent, and the circumstances. We might ask of the author at this point, "I wonder why he said this? Why did he put it this way? What does he have in mind here? What was he thinking about when he said this? It is an enlivening experience to "overhear" the text in this way and the congregation will appreciate this type of induction even during the sermon as together preacher and congregation go on a quest for understanding and application of Biblical truth.

Craddock's fifth suggestion is particularly insightful: Where does the preacher stand in relation to the text?[43] In other words, if Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees, Is the preacher standing in the place of Jesus and placing his congregation in the place of the Pharisees? If so, the sermon may take on an adversarial stance. Suppose instead, the preacher places himself in the place of the Pharisees and hears the rebuke of Jesus along with

---

[42] Ibid., 137.

his congregation. Or take a Pauline epistle, such as 1 Corinthians. Should the preacher place himself in the place of Paul rebuking the childishness of the Corinthians and allowing his congregation to stand in the place of the Corinthians? Or perhaps the preacher can stand alongside his congregation and hear Paul's rebuke as a member of the Corinthian church along with his congregation. This makes a tremendous difference in how a text is read and proclaimed.

One of the key concepts of developing the Biblical material is a keen understanding of what our task actually involves. As Larsen has written, "the preacher's task is to find what the Scripture means and then to preach what it says. Ours is not to *decide* what it means but to *discover* what it means."[44] We have pointed out earlier that each literary genre of Scripture offers unique challenges for sermon development. What makes the inductive approach appealing not only for reaching postmoderns, but for preaching in general is its flexibility with handling the various genres. Epistolary material is fairly easy to develop in a deductive pattern, but narrative material can lose its power under a deductive approach. As we pointed out earlier, no one likes to hear the end of the story before it is told, or the punch line of a joke before the actual joke. The inductive approach allows narratives to be proclaimed in their natural and normal sense. It should be noted that by some estimates, 70 percent of the Bible is written in the narrative genre.[45] Add to the narrative,

---

[43] Ibid., 139. "Location" or "perspective" is a critical issue in postmodern communication.

[44] Larsen, *Telling the Old Old Story*, 81.

[45] Ibid., ix. Larsen quotes Bruce Waltke who wrote that the Old Testament is 77 percent narrative, and he adds that "huge chunks" of the New Testament are narrative.

parables, apocalyptic and poetic genre, and the material which comprises the bulk of the Bible is best suited for treatment with the inductive approach.

Illustrating the Sermon

As we quoted earlier, Spurgeon says, "Illustrations are the windows that let light in the sermon." There is something unique that happens in the sermon when the preacher begins telling a story or using an illustration; eyes light up, facial expressions change, the slumbering wake up, the bored open up and even the countenance of the preacher changes. The atmosphere in the auditorium changes as well, we have all used the expression, "You could hear a pin drop." What is it about an illustration that so captivates an audience? An illustration invites the audience to enter into the preaching moment and experience the story. We are a generation raised on television and movies. We love a good story or a mystery. Just hearing those lines, "Once upon a time…" invites people of all ages to sit up in their seats and see what's coming next. Although, I wouldn't suggest that a preacher begin a story that way among adults. It might insult their intelligence.

Many preachers have regrettably admitted that their congregations seem to show more interest in the children's sermon than the "adult" sermon. Why is this so? Because everyone loves a story and we have a story to tell that is the greatest story ever told. Illustrations offer us the opportunity to make our message memorable, interesting, clear and applicable.

Larsen says, "The purpose of the illustration is to give us help with the more right-brained aspect of preaching."[46] Some sermons are too cerebral, and by that I mean they are directed primarily at the logical left side of the brain. An illustration invites our listeners to think creatively, to imagine the story and even form images in their brain. That is the reason the illustration lifts the spirits of the audience and captivates their attention. Leonard Sweet argues that "the postmodern culture is image-driven" and "images generate emotions, and people will respond to their feelings."[47] When we preach, we are aiming at more than the dispensing of information. We want our sermons to bring about transformation. In order to accomplish that, the sermon must communicate at an emotional and spiritual level as well as a rational level.

Galli and Larson point out that, "Emotion alone can be as empty as cotton candy. Logic alone can be clinical, a tasteless meal of vitamin pills. Together, they are a full course meal."[48] A caution should be noted here. A sermon that is full of great illustrations, but lacks content will leave our congregation empty and flat. The illustrations that have the greatest impact are those that specifically clarify, explain or apply the central idea of the message.

Illustrations should touch all the senses. As Leonard Sweet has pointed out, postmoderns are experience-oriented. They learn through experience and would rather "feel a truth" than only hear a proposition. McLaren suggests a unique feature of postmodernism

---

[46] Ibid., 118.

[47] Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims*, 86.

[48] Galli and Larson, *Preaching That Connects*, 75.

is their reliance on senses to understand and comprehend truth. He points out that, "A story can't be argued with or dismissed like a proposition. A story is sneaky. It doesn't teach by induction or deduction. It teaches by abduction. It abducts your attention and won't let you go until you have done some thinking for yourself."[49] This faculty of "abduction" can be capitalized upon only if the language we use causes our audience to see, hear, smell, taste and feel the message we are communicating.

In the same vein, Jay Adams suggests that our sermons utilize "evocative words" that touch as many senses as possible.[50] For example, one preacher might use an illustration that involves eating breakfast, while another will describe the "bacon crackling and spitting in the skillet." Words like that can cause your congregation to hear, smell and taste the illustration.[51] In a sermon on the omniscience and providence of God from Mathew 10:29-31 where Jesus said, "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father." You might point out that these sparrows were the food for the poor and add that there's probably more meat on a chicken wing than a sparrow. A little touch like that can help our audience visualize, imagine and experience the ideas presented in Scripture. Illustrations that evoke emotions can generate the kind of involvement and participation in the sermon that postmoderns need in order to apprehend truth.

---

[49] E. Gary Purdy, Jr., "Christ-Centered Preaching to a Postmodern Audience" (D.Min. diss., Reformed Theological Seminary, 2001), 102.

[50] Jay E. Adams, *Preaching with Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 88.

[51] Ibid., 89.

Illustrations function in a variety of ways depending on the flow of the sermon. In a deductive model, the illustrations usually serve to elaborate on the main points. In the inductive model, the illustrations serve to introduce the main points.[52] Illustrations function well at the beginning and end of a sermon as well. A good illustration that introduces the idea for the sermon immediately arouses the audience's attention and invites them to enter into the sermon in a more personal way. In an inductive sermon, several illustrations may be required to carefully lay out the truths that are being introduced inductively. At the end of the sermon, an illustration that ties together the main idea of the sermon and its key insights, truths, or themes, makes a dramatic impression on the audience. Illustrations of this sort often give the sermon that lasting quality that will help the congregation remember the sermon and apply it throughout their week and possibly throughout their life. Galli and Larson wrote:

> Like fireworks on Independence Day, illustrations put light, color, and excitement into our sermons. They celebrate the sermon's ideas and principles. The small ones – allusions, analogies, and clever turns of phrase – are designed to support small points. But when we want to drive home the major theme, we had best send up our most powerful and illuminating illustration.[53]

In some cases, the illustrations may become the main points of the sermon. Craddock wrote, "In good preaching what is referred to as illustrations are, in fact, stories or

---

[52]Eugene L. Lowry, "The Revolution of Sermonic Shape," in *Listening to the Word*, ed. Gail R. O'Day and Thomas G. Long (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 102.

[53]Galli and Larson, *Preaching That Connects*, 71.

anecdotes which do not illustrate the point; rather they *are* the point."[54] A spoken phrase is often less memorable and has less impact than a story. Jesus often used this technique. When one of his audiences asked, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus didn't give an explanation or definition, he told them the parable of the "Good Samaritan" (Luke 10:25-37). In that parable, He told the story of three men who were confronted with a man in trouble, a priest, a Levite and a Samaritan. At the end of His story, Jesus asked his audience, "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" He let them find themselves in the story and asked for a response. The lawyer who asked the question responded, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Jesus concluded His "sermon" with a call to commitment, "Go and do the same."

Well chosen, well timed and well placed illustrations are absolutely essential for creating sermons that involve listeners especially when the material being presented is non-narrative in nature. As we have pointed out, postmoderns "abduct" truth through experience, participation, images and connections. Illustrations can profoundly impact communication to postmoderns since they contain all of these components by their very nature.

Outlining the Sermon

Most preachers feel naked going into the pulpit without at least some form of outline. I agree with Larsen, here that taking a manuscript into the pulpit inhibits personal

---

[54] Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 204. It should be noted that an illustration can overshadow the message to such a degree that the point being made is lost and the illustration becomes the focus.

contact and spontaneity.[55] He suggests "extempore" or free delivery as the best means of allowing for good eye contact and the freedom to adapt the message as the listener responds to the delivery. He has, along with others, suggested going into the pulpit with no notes at all.[56] This does not mean that the preacher goes to the pulpit unprepared, what it does suggest is that the outline and basic elements of the sermon are so well constructed and committed to memory that the sermon may be preached with great freedom. Of course, not all of us have the mental acuity of a David Larsen. Therefore, it is perfectly acceptable to bring an outline or sermon notes to the pulpit. As for the manuscript, I think it takes even greater skill to preach with a manuscript in such a way that the listeners feel connected to the sermon. For postmoderns, a poorly read manuscript may be a signal that even the preacher is not sure about the sermon.

In an inductive approach, the outline may take on a variety of forms and so much the better. Variety is, as the saying goes, the spice of life. Sermons that always have the same pattern week in and week out can become dull for both the preacher and his congregation. Haddon Robinson lists sixteen possible patterns, fifteen of which utilize an inductive approach.[57] Let me point out seven of the most interesting and imaginative of these patterns he suggests: (1) *The Diamond Pattern*, is a one idea sermon that takes an idea and looks at it from every different possible angle, exploring all the possibilities in many

---

[55]Larsen, *The Anatomy of Preaching*, 188.

[56]Charles W. Koller, *Expository Preaching Without Notes* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962), 9-10.

[57]Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 68-74.

different ways. (2) *The Ladder Outline,* is a sermon that builds from one idea to the next. Each new idea is built upon the previous idea moving toward a climax. (3) *The Contrast Outline*, is a two-point pattern of development which contrasts two ideas. They might be contrasted as bad-good, negative-positive, right-wrong. If used in an inductive approach, the preacher leads the congregation to examine the alternatives and arrive at the desired proposition. (4) *The Question and Answer Outline*, is a great inductive pattern that asks a question and provides the answer, or asks a question and provides several possible answers leading the congregation to the correct response. (5) *The Chase Outline*, is a sermon which chases after the answer to a question or problem by asking, "Is this it?" "What about this? Is this it?" It can create a lively presentation that keeps the listeners involved as they move with the preacher on the quest for truth. (6) *The Diagnosis-Remedy*, states a diagnosis to a problem then moves to find the remedy. (7) *The "Hegelian" Outline,* uses Hegel's thesis, antithesis, synthesis pattern. The preacher states a possible thesis that his congregation may agree with, then states its antithesis which they may disagree with and finally arrives at a synthesis that all can agree with. Even though it begins with a thesis, it can be stated in a tentative way that allows for the induction to take place as the congregation follows the flow of the process.[58] Obviously, these represent just a taste of the possibilities for outlining. It seems strange that there are so many possibilities and yet the most common "three points and a poem" still seems to dominate the scene.

A point should be made here about transitions. We have argued that expository preaching has one main idea that should be the driving force behind the entire

---

[58] Ibid.

sermon. In order to bind together all the various parts of the sermon, transitions are key. Keith Willhite suggests some ways that transitions can "bundle a packaged deal."[59] First, if the sermon has a single concrete image that is the main idea, that image can be repeated throughout the sermon to bind the sermon together as a whole. One way of doing this is to begin the sermon with an illustration and continue to bring in elements or reminders of that illustration throughout the sermon.[60] Second, transitions can be used to review the various parts of the sermon so that the audience can sense progress in the sermon. Willhite wrote, "Like the airport bus driver, if we inform our listeners where we're going, in what order, and how soon, they'll relax and enjoy the ride."[61] Third, transitions can help the audience remember the purpose of the sermon or the main idea of the sermon. Keeping these central in the listener's mind helps keep their mind on track and focuses them toward the climax or conclusion of the sermon. In short, transitions are the glue that sticks the whole sermon together. Writing these transitional sentences out in full or at least thinking them through carefully can make the sermon that much more meaningful and preserve the flow of the sermon regardless of the style of outline employed.

Applying the Sermon

In the inductive sermon, the steady march toward climax and conclusion offer a wide variety of options when it comes to applications. Craddock pointed out that in order

---

[59] Keith Willhite, *Preaching with Relevance: Without Dumbing Down* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 73.

[60] Ibid., 76.

[61] Ibid.

to overcome the obstacle which challenges receptivity of the spoken word, inductive preaching offers a means of capturing this receptivity by leading the audience to arrive at a conclusion or application along with the preacher. And if this is done well, the application need not even be spoken.[62] Larsen, in his book, entitled *Telling the Old Old Story*, argues that the application should be spoken, even if it is implicit, and further suggests that applications should be running throughout the sermon.[63] This means that there is room for application at the beginning, during and after each of the main divisions, and again at the conclusion. Running applications such as this give listeners many opportunities to connect with the message and make it personal to their lives. Larsen says, "Preaching is application."[64] The application or applications should be formulated during the phase of sermon preparation when purpose is being developed. The purpose of the sermon will often dictate what kinds of applications are going to arise.

As John Stott has so aptly pointed out, our task in preaching is to bridge the chasm which divides the Biblical world from the contemporary world.[65] To do that, we must apply the Biblical truth to the contemporary audience and applications are essential. Where we put them in the sermon may, as Larsen has suggested, often make or break the sermon's success. I agree with Larsen here that applications that are made throughout the

---

[62]Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 57.

[63]Larsen, *Telling the Old Old Story*, 259.

[64]Ibid., 257.

[65]John R. W. Stott, "Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century," (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 132.

sermon are more likely to fulfill that mission of bridging two worlds than saving a brief pithy application for the very end. However, I agree with Craddock that all applications need not be explicitly stated. Some applications arise in an illustration and explicitly stating them may inhibit their power, since each listener will often make their own applications personal to their situation in life.

Concluding the Sermon

Haddon Robinson says, "Start with a bang and quit all over."[66] Larsen wrote, "Blessed is the preacher who can get airborne without too much runway" and "Blessed is the preacher whose train of thought has a caboose."[67] The conclusion of the sermon is the time to bring the truth to bear on the hearts of the listeners. It is the time to call for a decision, to arrive at the proposition and to move the listeners to some response. As we have already pointed out, the conclusion may be the place where the proposition is clearly stated for the first time, or it may be the place where the text is announced, as in Fred Craddock's sermon on "Doxology."[68] Larsen recommends to his homiletics students that they spend two thirds of their time preparing the last third of the sermon.[69]

The conclusion is the point in the sermon when the outline comes to its climax and depending on the type of outline pursued, the conclusion may take a variety of forms. In

---

[66]Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 159.

[67]Larsen, *Telling the Old Old Story*, 122.

[68]Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 163-168.

[69]Larsen, *The Anatomy of Preaching*, 121.

the outline patterns proposed earlier, the conclusion may reveal the answer to the question posed. It may take the form of the final facet of the diamond which reveals the completed picture of the idea or truth. It may represent the idea discovered in the "Chase Outline" or the remedy determined in the "diagnosis-remedy" outline. It may be the synthesis in the "Hegelian" outline or it may be a more traditional conclusion which calls for a response to the truth or proposition developed. It is the moment of decision. The conclusion of the sermon should be as dramatic as the introduction. It should call for a verdict from the jury. It is the closing statements at the end of the trial where the congregation must finally answer for themselves the question, "What then should I do with this man Jesus?"

I have not said much in this thesis about a Christocentric focus in preaching, but I am inclined to agree with Arturo Azurdio in his assertion that our preaching must ultimately proclaim the salvation we have in Jesus Christ. As he writes, "the Bible is a record of the redemption of the people of God by His Son, Jesus Christ."[70] He quotes Calvin as saying that "the Scriptures should be read with the aim of finding Christ in them."[71] It is said of C. H. Spurgeon that no matter what text he chose, he always read the text and made a bee-line for the cross. He makes the same point in his statement:

> Don't you know, young man, that from every town and every village and every hamlet in England, wherever it may be, there is a road that leads to London? . . . So from every text in Scripture there is a road toward the great metropolis, Christ. And

---

[70] Arturo G. Azurdia, *Spirit Empowered Preaching: The Vitality of the Holy Spirit in Preaching* (Great Britain: Christian Focus, 1998), 52.

[71] Ibid., 53.

> my dear brother, your business is, when you get to a text, to say, now what is the road that leads to Christ? . . . the sermon cannot do any good unless there is a savour of Christ in it.[72]

This is not to suggest that every sermon is necessarily an evangelistic message, but if Christ is not even mentioned in the sermon, Is it by definition a Christian sermon? Jay Adams wrote that "to preach Christ is to preach both what He has done and what He is doing."[73] In other words, we have more to say about the work of Christ than evangelism alone. Christ is at work now in the hearts and lives of our people and if we do not emphasize Christ in both His finished work and His continuing work, we do a great disservice to our people and we run the risk of turning the sermon into a self-help seminar.

Jesus said that one of the key roles of the Holy Spirit is to focus our attention on Jesus Christ (John 16:13-14). If we fail to glorify Christ in our preaching, then we run the risk of preaching without the power of the Holy Spirit. Suffice it to say that the conclusion is that moment in the sermon when a message that has led toward truth must finally face that truth. And if we bring our congregations ultimately to the truth that Jesus Christ is Lord, then we have indeed come to a place in the sermon where a conclusion really is the conclusion.

Narrative Preaching and The Homiletical Plot

The inductive approach offers wide latitude in the treatment of various types of literary genre, probably more so than the deductive model, but since the bulk of Scripture

---

[72] Ibid.

[73] Adams, *Preaching with Purpose*, 151.

(up to 70 percent) is narrative, I want to devote some space here to some special considerations regarding narrative preaching. David Larsen notes that Hans Frei, in *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* pointed out the inherent danger of treating all literary genres in exactly the same way. He argued that "instead of fitting ourselves into the Biblical world as represented in Scripture and feeling the excitement and force of a narrative, we have tended to neuter the text in a vain effort to fit the Biblical world into our own agenda."[74] Narrative passages deserve to be treated in a narrative way, even if this pattern seems alien compared to our Seminary homiletics courses. Larsen himself admits that in his homiletics classes, he has added the narrative model to his instruction due in large part to the contemporary discussion regarding the discursive treatment of narrative texts.[75]

Narrative preaching opens up a whole new avenue for reaching postmoderns. In keeping with the suggestions Leonard Sweet has made that our preaching incorporate experiential, participatory, image-laden, and connective elements, a narrative style can accomplish all four when it is done well. The stories of the Bible invite the listener to experience the tragedies and triumphs of Bible characters. A good narrative sermon will bring the audience into the story and allow them to relate to the experiences of the ancient world. A good sermon on Jonah should make the audience smell the seaweed, taste the salt water, and feel the digestive juices burning the flesh.

---

[74] Larsen, *Telling the Old Old Story*, 22.

[75] Ibid., 21.

Narrative sermons are inherently participatory. The listeners are working toward solving the mystery or sensing the climatic moment along with the preacher. A good sermon on the life of Joseph should make the audience feel angry at Joseph's brothers, despairing at his false imprisonment and cry with joy at his final elevation to "prime minister." The narratives of Scripture are already image-laden and may need only minor explanation to bring them into contemporary understanding. A good sermon on Abraham at Mount Moriah should be able to picture with all the rich details the scene of Abraham holding the knife aloft ready to plunge it into Isaac's chest.

Finally, narratives are great vehicles for helping the contemporary audience connect with the Biblical characters and recognize that they too can connect with God. Obviously, a good sermon should move the listeners to make some response to the message. I am still of the mind that an invitation is a good thing. It may be that in this postmodern world, we may need to bring back the public invitation that has lately gone by the wayside. If postmoderns need to connect, as Sweet has argued, then our preaching should give them an opportunity to connect with Jesus. One way of doing this is during a time of extended "praise and worship" following the sermon. The invitation can be extended as an offer to pray for those who have a desire connect with God in a deeper way. This approach would not necessarily be automatically rejected by postmoderns. Many would see it as an opportunity to participate in worship and meet their need for experience and participation.

Having said all that by way of introduction, I think Eugene Lowry has developed a pattern for sermon development that incorporates all of the goals we have set out

to accomplish in reaching postmoderns. He calls his approach, "the homiletical plot."[76] This is certainly not the only way to treat a narrative passage, but it has great merit for many narratives and especially the parables. The idea of forming the sermon as a plot means that the preacher develops the sermon so that a tension exists which calls for some resolution. This is exactly the type of approach we have been arguing for in embracing the inductive approach, but Lowry fleshes this out with more dramatic appeal. In order to frame the sermon as a homiletical plot, Lowry suggests that we have to find the "itch" and then help our audience discover how to "scratch" the itch.[77]

If we begin with a Biblical text, then the development of the sermon idea will involve determining the "itch" that the passage can "scratch." In some cases, we stand in our pulpits when our congregation already has an "itch" and our sermon must "scratch" that itch. I remember preaching on the Sunday following the tragedy that occurred on September 11, 2001 at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. I was preaching to a predominately military audience; there was definitely an "itch" in the air. I was right in the middle of a sermon series on the book of Joshua. In fact, the next text would have been the total defeat at the battle of Ai (Joshua 7). I could not bring myself to preach on that terrible defeat that came about because of the sin of Achan and open the possibility that my congregation would make a connection to America. Two television preachers had already made that blunder and were strongly criticized for their insensitivity. I also could not avoid speaking some word

---

[76] Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: the Sermon as Narrative Art Form* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980), 15.

[77] Ibid., 21.

from God that would help my congregation cope and direct them toward God. I chose to preach on Romans 12:9-13:7 in a message I entitled, "A Biblical Response to Terrorism." In that sermon, I pointed out our personal response to enemies, the government's response to enemies and the military's role in response to enemies. This was an occasion that had a built in "itch" and the Bible provided the "scratch" for that itch.

Lowry's pattern for development in *The Homiletical Plot* involves five stages. "The stages are: (1) upsetting the equilibrium, (2) analyzing the discrepancy, (3) disclosing the clue to resolution, (4) experiencing the gospel, and (5) anticipating the consequences." Lowry's students came up with a shorthand for the five stages: (1) Oops, (2) Ugh, (3) Aha, (4) Whee, and (5) Yeah.[78] The first stage in the development, "upsetting the equilibrium," involves creating a sense of ambiguity. Lowry quotes Dewey as saying, "thinking begins at the point of a felt problem."[79] This is the "itch." The ambiguity involved in a problem causes the audience to begin thinking about solutions or feeling the urgency of the problem.

The second stage, "analyzing the discrepancy," is a "diagnosis" phase. In this stage, the preacher probes the problem with questions of "Why?" This stage of development make take on the shape of the "Chase Outline" we mentioned earlier. The preacher may say, "Is this the problem? Is this the problem? Is it this? Is it that?" The goal is to allow the tension to continue to build.

---

[78] Ibid., 25.

[79] Ibid., 30.

The third stage, "disclosing the clue to resolution" has a key element. It includes a "reversal" which brings a surprise.[80] This is the plot twist that catches the audience by surprise and often makes the difference in overcoming hostility or unbelief. "Once the clue to resolution is articulated, the hearer is ready to receive the Word—to discover how the gospel of Jesus Christ intersects the human predicament."[81]

Lowry's fourth stage, "experiencing the gospel" develops more fully this clue to resolution. If the stage has been set, then the gospel message is ripe for the telling. For the postmodern listener, this process will help them "abduct" the truth. The message of the gospel can become; not some alien metanarrative, but their own story. They see themselves in the sermon and recognize the tension that has been building and are surprised to discover that this message is directed at them.

Lowry's fifth stage, "anticipating the consequences" moves the sermon toward an appeal for response. He suggests that there are three approaches to relieving the tension created in the sermon and moving the person toward decision. We can "push" the person from behind and magnify the consequences; we can reduce the tension and "pull" the person toward decision by revealing the possibilities; or we can use a combination of the two approaches.[82] Most people are turned off by "guilt trips" and a heavy push that emphasizes the negative consequences may push a person toward more hostility and less openness.

---

[80] Ibid., 56.

[81] Ibid., 61.

[82] Ibid., 71.

In a more recent formulation of the homiletical plot, *The Sermon: Dancing the Edge of Mystery,* Lowry admits that "the term consequences does carry some unnecessary freight."[83] In order to overcome this obstacle and provide a simpler format, Lowry has proposed just four stages in the reformulation: *conflict, complication, sudden shift, and unfolding.*[84] The first two stages are virtually the same, just renamed; however, the third and fourth stage, "disclosing the clue to resolution" and "experiencing the gospel" are subsumed under the single term, "sudden shift." "Unfolding" includes some carry over from "experiencing the gospel" and "anticipating the consequences." Using this simpler reformulation; let me provide some Biblical examples of how this homiletical plot is already a device inherent in many Biblical narratives.

Jesus, the master storyteller often used this technique in His parables. Take for example Jesus' sermon on what it means to be lost in Luke 15. He told a story of a man with one hundred sheep who loses one and leaves the ninety-nine to go after the one lost sheep. When he found the lost sheep, he called his neighbors and invited them to come and celebrate with him. Then He told another story of a woman who had ten silver coins and lost one. She swept her house and searched until she found it. When she found it, she called her neighbors and invited them to come and celebrate with her because she found the lost coin. Finally, He told a story of a man who had two sons and one decided to take his share of the estate and leave home for a life of wanton pleasure. This is the first stage, *conflict* or creating

---

[83] Ibid., 85.

[84] Eugene L. Lowry, *The Sermon: Dancing the Edge of Mystery* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 57.

a sense of ambiguity. Jesus' audience could probably relate well to having lost something precious and each of the three stories builds this tension.

The audience is involved in the story and already probing for an answer to the question, "What is He getting at?" Jesus tells how the prodigal came to his senses and decided to return home to his father. Obviously I am leaving out critical details of this story that should be fully developed. The second stage, *complication* is occurring in the mind of the prodigal as he searches for a solution to his terrible dilemma. When he arrives at the solution that he will return to his father, willing to be a slave we begin to see the third stage emerging, *sudden shift.* In this stage, the key to the plot is some form of surprise reversal. Jesus pictures the father, who represents God, running to meet the prodigal and lovingly forgiving him. A celebration is prepared. They kill the fatted calf and prepare a great feast. But Jesus has one more plot twist, the older brother returns from the field angry that his wayward brother is being treated to such a celebration.

The fourth stage, *unfolding*, begins to emerge as the older brother complains to the father that he had never been given a party like this. The father replies, "My child, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to be merry and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found." That's the gospel message in a nutshell. In this story, the application is implied rather than explicitly stated. Jesus told this story to a group of grumbling Pharisees and scribes who complained that Jesus "receives sinners and eats with them." Jesus' parable makes clear that these Pharisees are the older brother in the story.

The climatic surprise in the third phase, *sudden shift,* is really one of the key elements that make this homiletic plot so beneficial for reaching postmoderns.[85] As we quoted earlier, McLaren says, "A story is sneaky. . . . It abducts your attention and won't let you go until you have done some thinking for yourself."[86]

Jay Adams proposes a plot development that may be even simpler that Lowry's. He suggests the five stages be labeled: (1) background, (2) a complication or problem, (3) suspense, (4) climax, and (5) conclusion.[87] Buttrick is another advocate of the "plot" and instead of using the term "points" in a sermon, he suggests the term "moves."[88] This may be the best way to write the sermon outline, by noting the various "moves" and the elements that should be included under each movement in the sermon.

What is so appealing about this approach is the possibility it creates not only for preaching evangelistic sermons to the lost, but for preaching messages on Christian maturity to the saved. With this approach both can be carried out seamlessly in the same message. This sermon form also translates to a variety of different types of outlines. The basic idea of these four or five stages of development describes how the sermon builds

---

[85] Jesus used this technique of reversal or *sudden shift* in many of His parables. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the Samaritan, a people group hated by the Jews, becomes the example of a good neighbor. The prophet Nathan used a similar tactic in his story to David of the poor man whose pet sheep was taken by a rich man for a meal, when he had many sheep. After moving David to intense anger toward this rich man, Nathan says, "Thou art the man!" (2 Samuel 12:1-7) The ability to build a story with this kind of plot twist is powerful and arresting.

[86] Purdy, "Christ-Centered Preaching," 102.

[87] Adams, *Preaching with Purpose*, 93.

[88] Lowry, "Revolution in Sermonic Shape," 99.

tension and moves toward resolution of the tension. Of course, our ultimate goal is to present a message that transforms the lives of our listeners and especially the lives of postmoderns.

The Essentials of a Good Sermon for Postmoderns

What are the characteristics of a good sermon? If you heard a sermon that you thought was a really good sermon, what made it good? Jay Adams suggested that there are five essentials of a good sermon. I would like to suggest that these are the essentials for a good sermon for postmoderns. First, a good sermon for postmoderns is *preaching*. It is "not a string of stories or a stodgy lecture;" it is preaching that brings the Bible alive and lets us hear from God.[89] There has been some debate in the last few centuries over whether there is a distinction between "preaching" and "teaching." Some preachers say, "Preaching is just louder." Should we be doing more "preaching" or "teaching"? In the New Testament, the Greek words, *kerusso* and *euaggelizo* are normally translated "preaching" and *didasko*, is normally translated "teaching." In some cases they are used together in the same sentence as if they are interchangeable.[90] However, there may be at least a subtle distinction between the two terms. In Biblical usage, "preaching" is more often related to the gospel and the kingdom of God; whereas, "teaching" covers a broader range of issues.[91] In our

---

[89] Adams, *Preaching with Purpose*, 156-157.

[90] In Matthew 11:1, 1 Timothy 5:17; 6:2, and Acts 15:35; 28:31, they are used in the same sentence "preaching and teaching." In the Acts 28:31 passage, Luke writes that Paul was "preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ . . . ." This may point to some distinction between the two terms in Luke's mind.

[91] The word "teaching" and its cognates occurs twice as often as "preaching." The word *didasko* and cognates occurs 179 times in the New Testament and the words *kerruso* and *euaggelizo* occur eighty-three times.

contemporary setting, teaching has taken on the meaning of an "informative" presentation; whereas, preaching is often characterized as a more "transformative" presentation. I would argue that the Bible's use of both terms aimed at transformation and likewise I believe that all of our preaching should be transformative in nature, regardless of what we call it. We want to do more for postmoderns than simply inform them. Postmoderns are typically suspicious of knowledge claims, but would welcome a transforming experience. We want God to use our sermons to bring about change in their lives. A good sermon for postmoderns is preaching with a goal toward transformation.

Second, a good sermon for postmoderns is *Biblical* preaching. It is not a lecture on some truth, philosophy or the ideas of some public figure. It is a sermon that proclaims the Bible with authority. This is the reason we have so strongly asserted that our preaching must be expository preaching. This method has as its greatest strength the preservation of the authority of Scriptures, but that is not all. Expository preaching also preserves the sufficiency of Scripture. Steven Lawson has written an article entitled, "Sola Scriptura: The Sufficiency of Scripture in Expository Preaching," in which he demonstrates the "supernatural potency" of the Scripture when the expository method is employed. He pointed out that Scripture possesses the "power to connect," the "power to convict," the "power to convert," the "power to conform," the "power to counsel" and the "power to conquer."[92] The Scriptures have the power to "connect" because as Hebrews 4:12 says, the

---

[92]Steven J. Lawson, "Sola Scriptura: The Sufficiency of Scripture in Expository Preaching," *Preaching* 18, no. 2 (September-October 2002): 20-26. I will be following Lawson's article closely and utilizing the texts he references in his article on this discussion.

"Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword." The Word of God has the power to penetrate into hearts and minds, even the hard-hearted and hostile minds we may be confronted with in postmoderns. The Scriptures have the power to "convict" because again as Hebrews 4:12 suggests, the Word of God is "piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit . . . and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." The Word of God has the power to pierce through the jaded, morally relative soul and bring about conviction that can lead to conversion and transformation. The Scriptures have the power to "convert" because as 1 Peter 1:23 says, we are "born again not of seed that is perishable but imperishable, that is through the living and abiding Word of God." When we proclaim the Scriptures we plant "imperishable" seeds in the hearts of our people that God uses to bring about conversion. The Scripture has the power to "conform" our lives to the truth because as Jesus said in John 17:17 the "Word is truth." Jesus prayed to the Father, "Sanctify them in the truth, because Your Word is truth." How do we handle the postmodern bent toward relative truth, relative morality, and religious pluralism? We proclaim the Scriptures to them and let God and His Word sanctify their life. The Scriptures have the power to "counsel" because as Psalm 119:105 teaches, "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." And Psalm 119:9 asks "How can a young man keep his way pure?" and answers, "By keeping it according to Thy Word." Postmoderns need the Word of God because they do need counsel in their lives and there is no greater counsel than God's counsel in His Word. Finally, the Scripture has the power to "conquer" and by this Lawson is referring to the Word of God which serves as the "Sword of the Spirit," a powerful weapon that can be used to

combat satanic forces that seek to attack us and defeat us.[93] Postmoderns who have accepted the philosophical tenets of postmodernism are in dire need of the conquering Word of God to overcome what is essentially a case of the "god of this world" blinding their minds (2 Corinthians 4:4). A good sermon for postmoderns is *Biblical* Preaching.

Third, a good sermon for postmoderns is *interesting*. The preacher draws every possible bit of substance out of the passage and presents it like a fine chef. Adams wrote, "Men and women (and especially young people) are being turned away from Christ and His church by dull, unarresting, unedifying, and aimless preaching."[94] Our sermons should be interesting. We have the most interesting and exciting message the world has ever known. What makes a sermon interesting? First, an interesting sermon has a single focus. As we pointed out, Haddon Robinson calls this the "Big Idea."[95] A sermon that teaches too many different ideas can quickly lose the audience and cause their minds to drift. Paul Wilson has made a strong case for this single focus, suggesting that in order to prevent aimless wandering; we should "be guided by six signs along the highway of sermon composition." He says we should identify: one text, one theme, one doctrine, one need, one image and one mission.[96] Concentrating our focus so that we are preaching only one of each of these homiletical elements can help crystallize the message and bring clarity to the sermon.

---

[93] Ibid.

[94] Adams, *Preaching with Purpose*, xi.

[95] Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 34.

[96] Richard L. Eslinger, *The Web of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 201.

Second, an interesting sermon targets a specific felt need. One of the greatest complements I ever receive after a sermon is, "Preacher, it seemed like you were speaking directly to me." The only way that ever comes about is through good exegesis of the congregation as well as the text. As we pointed out earlier, the five unique needs of postmoderns that Amy Mears and Charles Bugg suggested provide a helpful starting point. They suggested five needs that are often overlooked include: "the need for acceptance, the need for hope, the need for ecological awareness, the need for inclusion, and the need for distinctiveness."[97] We have also noted that postmoderns have unique epistemological needs that can be met by demonstrating our understanding of their aversion to "metanarratives," their employment of a "hermeneutic of suspicion" and their use of deconstruction. Sermons that meet felt needs make a sermon more interesting.

A third ingredient in interesting sermons involves the style of delivery. We have argued extensively that an inductive approach captures greater interest and a narrative style keeps our audience involved in the sermon. The homiletical plot is a fine example of combining the inductive and narrative approaches making narrative passages come alive during the sermon. Even in non-narrative material, the use of illustrations, images and metaphors are powerful tools for understanding and they have the added benefits of relaxing an audience and keep them interested in the sermon. Sermons which have a single focus, meet felt needs and include vivid illustrative material produce interesting sermons, an essential to a good sermon for postmoderns.

---

[97] Amy Mears and Charles Bugg, "Issues in Preaching in the 21st Century," *Review and Expositor* 90, no. 1 (winter 1993): 341.

Fourth, a good sermon for postmoderns is *well-organized.* It moves with purpose and direction. The thought is clear. It has balance and meaning. We have demonstrated a number of options available for sermon organization. Whether the passage is didactic, narrative, parable, apocalyptic, or poetic the sermon should have good organization which complements the type of literary genre, the purpose of the passage and the best approach to good communication. Sermons which wander around looking for a point will leave the congregation bored and confused. Even sermons that proceed in narrative moves have a point, a focus, a purpose and an application. Keeping the audience focused toward achieving the purpose of the sermon is probably the best defense against a poorly organized sermon.

Fifth, a good sermon for postmoderns is *practical.* It not only tells what God has said, it tells us how to do what God has commanded.[98] Our goal in preaching to postmoderns is to bring about transformation. The Word of God is not constructed merely as a historical book about ancient people. It is a handbook for living. Our applications should reflect this practical dimension of the sermon. Clear, targeted applications demonstrate not only *what* must be done, but *how* it is done with God's help. When we proclaim the Word of God with a goal toward achieving transformation, we have the power inherent in the Word of God to accomplish that purpose and we have the anointing of the Holy Spirit to bring about that transformation. In short, a good sermon is Biblical proclamation that is interesting, well-organized and practical.

---

[98] Adams, *Preaching with Purpose*, 156-157.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this thesis we posed the question, "How do we preach to postmoderns in order to bring about transformation in their lives?" We have demonstrated the challenges and opportunities we face in reaching postmoderns, and argued that preaching is still a valid enterprise, full of resources for meeting this challenge. In answer to this question, we have offered an integrative model that is both faithful to Scripture and culturally relevant.

This integrative model, we have argued, must be *faithful* to Scripture and thus we have defended the expository method as the best means of remaining true to the text. This method develops the content of the sermon which should be solid and Biblical if it is to communicate a message that has real value for the postmodern.

In order to overcome the barriers presented by postmodern epistemology, we have argued that the sermon should *follow* an inductive pattern. This does not mean that we have abdicated the authority of Scripture. It means that we are sensitive to the needs of our people and recognize that God can communicate powerfully through His word with or without our propositions.

We have argued that the postmoderns apprehend truth experientially and therefore it is more helpful if the sermon *feels* like a story or narrative. That does not mean

that all preaching is narrative preaching or that our theology is informed by narrative alone. It means that the narrative style represents the best way to communicate to postmoderns who apprehend truth less by rationalism and more by intuition, imagination and experience.

In order to meet the needs postmoderns have for participation in the sermon process and a feeling of connectedness to the message, we have suggested that it is helpful if the sermon *flows* like a plot. Once again, postmoderns have a tendency toward apprehending truth when they feel they have experienced the truth. The plot provides a means of capturing attention and focusing the mind, will and emotions toward resolution of conflict and overcomes the obstacles of hostility and disinterest. In summary, this integrative model for preaching to postmoderns is *faithful* to the text, *follows* an inductive pattern, *feels* like a narrative and *flows* like a plot.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adams, Jay E. *Preaching with Purpose.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982.

Allen, David L. "Preaching and Postmodernism: An Evangelical Comes to the Dance." *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 5, no. 2 (summer 2001): 62-79.

_____. "A Tale of Two Roads: The New Homiletic and Biblical Authority." *Preaching* 18, no. 2 (September-October 2002): 27-38.

Allen, Diogenes. *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World.* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989.

Anderson, Kenton C. *Preaching with Conviction: Connecting with Postmodern Listeners.* Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001.

Anderson, Walter Truett. *Reality Isn't What It Used to Be: Theatrical Politics, Ready-to-Wear Religion, Global Myths, Primitive Chic, and Other Wonders of the Postmodern World.* San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990.

Apokis, Con. "Have You Met the New Audience?" *Grid* (spring 1995): 7-8.

Azurdia, Arturo G. *Spirit Empowered Preaching: The Vitality of the Holy Spirit in Preaching.* Great Britain: Christian Focus, 1998.

Barna, George. *The Barna Report: What Americans Believe.* Ventura, Calif.: Regal, 1991.

_____. *The Barna Report 1992-1993: America Renews its Search for God.* Ventura, Calif.: Regal, 1992.

_____. *Evangelism That Works.* Ventura, Calif.: Regal, 1995.

_____. *The Frog in the Kettle: What Christians Need to Know About Life in the Year 2000.* Ventura, Calif.: Regal, 1990.

Bartel, Don. "Evangelizing Postmoderns Using a Mission Outpost Strategy." In *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns*, ed. D. A. Carson, 343-51. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000.

Bartlett, David L. "Texts Shaping Sermons." In *Listening to the Word*, ed. Gail R. O'Day and Thomas G. Long, 147-66. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993.

Bloesch, Donald G. *The Future of Evangelical Christianity*. Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1988.

Broadus, John Albert. *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*. 4th ed. Revised by Vernon L. Stanfield. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979.

Brown, Colin. *Philosophy & the Christian Faith.* London: Tyndale, 1968.

Brown, Steve. *How to Talk So People Will Listen.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993.

Brown, Steve, Haddon Robinson, and William Willimon. *A Voice in the Wilderness: Clear Preaching in a Complicated World.* Portland, Ore.: Multnomah, 1993.

Brown, William E. "Theology in a Postmodern Culture: Implications of a Video-Dependent Society." In *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery, 158-67. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001.

Burnham, Frederic B., ed. *Postmodern Theology: Christian Faith in a Pluralist World.* New York: Harper and Row, 1989.

Cabal, Ted. "An Introduction of Postmodernity: Where are We, How Did We Get Here, and Can we Get Home?" *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 5, no. 2 (summer 2001): 4-19.

Carson, Donald A. *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.

_____. "The SBJT Forum: Profiles of Expository Preaching." Interview. *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 3, no 2. (summer 1999): 86-96.

_____. "Six Reasons Not to Abandon Expository Preaching." *Leadership* 17 (summer 1996): 87-88.

Carson, Donald A., ed. *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000.

Chapell, Bryan. "Components of Expository Preaching." *Preaching* 10, no. 6 (May-June 1995): 4-11.

Clements, Roy. "Expository Preaching in a Postmodern World." *Evangelical Review of Theology* 23, no. 2 (April 1999): 174-82.

Corney, Peter. "Have You God the Right Address? Post-modernism and the Gospel." *Grid* (spring 1995): 1-7.

Craddock, Fred B. *As One Without Authority.* Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1971.

_____. *Preaching.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985.

Derrida, Jacques. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, ed. John D. Caputo. New York: Fordham University Press, 1997.

Dever, John. "As the Church Moves into the Twenty-First Century: Some Extended Observations." *Review and Expositor* 93, no. 1 (winter 1996): 11-26.

Dockery, David S., ed. *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995.

Duduit, Michael, ed. *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching.* Nashville: Broadman, 1992.

Erickson, Millard J. *The Postmodern World: Discerning the Times and the Spirit of our Age.* Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2002.

_____. *Postmodernizing the Faith: Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of Postmodernism.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998.

_____. *Truth or Consequences: The Promise and Perils of Postmodernism.* Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001.

Erickson, Millard J., and James L. Heflin. *Old Wine in New Wineskins: Doctrinal Preaching in a Changing World.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997.

Eslinger, Richard L. *The Web of Preaching.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002.

Fant, Clyde E. *Preaching for Today.* 2d ed. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987.

Feinberg, Paul. "The Fifth Sparrow." Trinity Evangelical Divinity School Chapel, Deerfield, Illinois, 30 October 2002.

Ford, Kevin Graham, and Jim Denney. *Jesus for a New Generation.* Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995.

Foucault, Michel. "Nietzche, Genealogy, History." In *Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon, 1984.

Fountain, Jeff. "Postmodernity: A Look Ahead." *Reality* 4, no. 20 (April-May 1997): 13-17.

Galli, Mark, and Craig Brian Larson. *Preaching that Connects: Using the Techniques of Journalists to Add Interest to Your Sermons.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.

Gallup, George, and Sarah Jones. *100 Questions and Answers: Religion in America.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Research Center, 1989.

Glodo, Michael J. "The Bible in Stereo: New Opportunities for Biblical Interpretation in an A-Rational Age." In *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery, 106-30. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001.

Goetz, David. "The Riddle of Our Culture: What is Postmodernism?" *Leadership* (winter 1997): 52-56.

Grenz, Stanley J. *A Primer on Postmodernism.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.

_____. *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the Twenty-First Century.* Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

_____. "Star Trek and the Next Generation: Postmodernism and the Future of Evangelical Theology." In *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement,* ed. David S. Dockery, 75-89. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001.

Groothuis, Douglas. *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism.* Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

Hall, Eugene, and James L. Heflin. *Proclaim the Word!* Nashville: Broadman Press, 1985.

Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change.* Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1989.

Hendricks, Howard G. *Teaching to Change Lives.* Portland, Ore.: Multnomah, 1987.

Henry, Carl F. H. "Postmodernism: The New Spectre?" In *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement,* ed. David S. Dockery, 34-52. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001.

Hollinger, Dennis. "Preaching to Both Brains." *Preaching* 11, no. 4 (July-August 1995): 35.

Horstman, Joey. "The Postmodern Yawn." *The Other Side* (May-June 1993): 34-35.

Hughes, Kent. "The Anatomy of Exposition: *Logos, Ethos,* and *Pathos.*" *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 3, no. 2 (summer 1999): 44-58

Hunter, George G., III. *How to Reach Secular People.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992.

Hybels, Bill, Haddon Robinson, and Stuart Brisco. *Mastering Contemporary Preaching.* Portland, Ore.: Multnomah, 1989.

Iliffe, James. "Searching for Reality in a Postmodern Age." *On Being* (September 1996): 34-38.

Johnston, Graham. *Preaching to a Postmodern World.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001.

Keller, Tim. "Preaching Morality in an Amoral Age." *Leadership* 17 (winter 1996): 110-15.

Kenneson, Philip D. "There's No Such Thing as Objective Truth, and It's a Good Thing Too." In *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World*, ed. Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm, 155-70. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1995.

Koller, Charles W. *Expository Preaching without Notes.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962.

Kozol, Jonathan. *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools.* New York: Harper Perennial, 1991.

Kuhn, Thomas S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.

Lakeland, Paul. *Postmodernity: Christian Identity in a Fragmented Age.* Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997.

Larsen, David L. *The Anatomy of Preaching: Identifying the Issues in Preaching Today.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989.

_____. *The Company of the Preachers: A History of Biblical Preaching from the Old Testament to the Modern Era.* Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998.

_____. *Telling the Old Old Story: The Art of Narrative Preaching.* Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1995.

Lawson, Steven J. "Sola Scriptura: The Sufficiency of Scripture in Expository Preaching." *Preaching* 18, no. 2 (September-October 2002): 20-26.

Leffel, Jim. "Our New Challenge: Postmodernism." In *The Death of Truth,* ed. Dennis McCallum, 31-44. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1996.

_____. "Our Old Challenge: Modernism." In *The Death of Truth,* ed. Dennis McCallum, 19-30. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1996.

Leffel, Jim, and Dennis McCallum. "Postmodern Impact: Religion." In *The Death of Truth,* ed. Dennis McCallum, 199-214. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1996.

Lewis, Ralph, and Gregg Lewis. *Inductive Preaching: Helping People Listen.* Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1983.

Long, Jimmy. "Generating Hope: A Strategy for Reaching the Postmodern Generation." In *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns,* ed. D. A. Carson, 322-33. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000.

Long, Thomas G. *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible.* Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989.

Loscalzo, Craig. "Apologizing for God: Apologetic Preaching to a Postmodern World." *Review and Expositor* 93, no. 3 (summer 1996): 405-18.

_____. *Evangelistic Preaching That Connects.* Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995.

Lowry, Eugene L. *The Homiletical Plot: the Sermon as Narrative Art Form.* Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980.

_____. "The Revolution of Sermonic Shape." In *Listening to the Word*, ed. Gail R. O'Day and Thomas G. Long, 93-112. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993.

_____. *The Sermon: Dancing the Edge of Mystery.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997.

Lundin, Roger. *The Culture of Interpretation: Christian Faith and the Postmodern World.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993.

_____. "The Pragmatics of Postmodernity." In *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World,* ed. Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm, 24-38. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1995.

Lyon, David. *Postmodernity*, 2d ed. Concepts in Social Thought. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

Mackay, Hugh. *Why Don't People Listen?* Sydney, Australia: Pan Macmillan, 1994.

Mayhue, Richard L. "Rediscovering Expository Preaching." In *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* ed. Richard L. Mayhue, 3-21. Dallas: Word, 1992.

McCallum, Dennis. *The Death of Truth.* Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1996.

McLaren, Brian. *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000.

_____. "They Say It's Just a Phase." *Next Wave* (October 2002) [journal on-line] Accessed 8 October 2002. Available from http://www.next-wave.org/oct02/mclaren2002.htm; internet.

Mears, Amy, and Charles Bugg. "Issues in Preaching in the Twenty-First Century." *Review and Expositor* 90, no. 3 (summer 1993): 341-50.

Middleton, Richard J., and Brian J. Walsh. *Truth is Stranger than it Used to Be.* Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995.

Miller, Calvin. *Marketplace Preaching: How to Return the Sermon to Where it Belongs.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995.

_____. *Spirit, Word, and Story: A Philosophy of Marketplace Preaching.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989.

Minkema, Kenneth P., and Richard A. Bailey, eds. "Reason, Revelation, and Preaching: An Unpublished Ordination Sermon by Jonathan Edwards." *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 3, no. 2 (summer 1999): 16-33.

Mitchell, C. Ben. "Is That All There Is? Moral Ambiguity in a Postmodern Pluralistic Culture." In *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery, 144-57. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001.

Mohler, R. Albert, Jr. "The Integrity of the Evangelical Tradition and the Challenge of the Postmodern Paradigm." In *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery, 53-74. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001.

Moore, Peter C. *Disarming the Secular Gods: How to Talk So Skeptics Will Listen.* Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1989.

Murray, Iain H. *D. Martin Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1961.* Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1990.

Natoli, Joseph, and Linda Hutcheon, eds. *A Postmodern Reader.* Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1993.

Netland, Harold. *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith & Mission.* Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2001.

Netland, Harold A., and Keith E. Johnson. "Why is Religious Pluralism Fun—and Dangerous?" In *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns*, ed. D. A. Carson, 47-67. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000.

Newbigin, Lesslie. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989.

Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Christ and Culture.* New York: Harper and Row, 1951.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. "Truth and the Extra-moral Sense." In *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kauffmann. New York: Viking, 1968.

O'Day, Gail R., and Thomas G. Long, eds. *Listening to the Word: Studies in Honor of Fred B. Craddock.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993.

Oden, Thomas C. *After Modernity . . . What? Agenda for Theology.* Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1990.

_____. *Two Worlds: Notes on the Death of Modernity in America and Russia.* Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992.

Orwell, George. *1984.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1949.

Phillips, Timothy R., and Dennis L. Okholm, eds. *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World.* Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995.

Piper, John. "The Divine Majesty of the Word: John Calvin, the Man and His Preaching." *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 3, no. 2 (summer 1999): 4-15.

Plantinga, Alvin. *Warranted Christian Belief.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Pojman, Louis P. *What Can We Know? An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, 2d ed. Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 2001.

Polluck, John L., and Joseph Cruz. *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge.* Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999.

Purdy, E. Gary, Jr. "Christ-Centered Preaching to a Postmodern Audience." D.Min. diss., Reformed Theological Seminary, 2001.

Rabey, Steve. *In Search of Authentic Faith: How Emerging Generations are Transforming the Church.* Colorado Springs: Waterbook Press, 2001.

Reid, Robert Stephen. "Postmodernism and the Function of the New Homiletic in Post-Christendom Congregations." *Homiletic* 20 (winter 1995): 1-13.

Robinson, Haddon. *Biblical Preaching*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980.

Robinson, Martin. "Post What? Renewing Our Minds in a Postmodern World." *On Being* 24, no 2 (March 1997): 28-32.

Rorty, Richard. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979.

Rowell, Ed. "Where Preaching is Headed." *Leadership* (winter 1997): 95-98.

Roxburgh, Alan J. *Reaching a New Generation: Strategies for Tomorrow's Church.* Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

Schaeffer, Francis A. *Escape from Reason.* In *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer.* Vol. 1, *A Christian View of Philosophy and Culture.* Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1982.

_____. *How Should We Then Live?* Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1976.

Sire, James W. "Why Should Anyone Believe Anything at All?" In *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns*, ed. D. A. Carson, 93-101. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000.

Somerville, Jim. "Preaching to the Right Brain." *Preaching* 10, no. 4 (Jan-Feb 1995): 36-39.

Spurgeon, Charles H. *Lectures to My Students.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954.

Stitzinger, James. "Study Tools for Expository Preaching." In *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* ed. Richard L. Mayhue, 177-208. Dallas: Word, 1992.

Stivers, Dan R. "Much Ado about Athens and Jerusalem: The Implications of Postmodernism for Faith." *Review and Expositor* 91, no. 1 (winter 1994): 83-102.

Stott, John R. W. *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.

Swank, J. Grant, Jr. "Excitement About Expository Preaching." *Preaching* 6, no. 1 (July-August 1990): 9-11.

Sweet, Leonard D. *Carpe Manana.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.

_____. *Postmodern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century World.* Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000.

_____. *Soul Tsunami.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999.

Tapia, Andres. "Reaching the First Post-Christian Generation." *Christianity Today*, 12 September 1994, 18-23.

Unger, Merrill F. *Principles of Expository Preaching.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1955.

Veith, Gene Edward, Jr. *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture.* Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1994.

Vines, Jerry. *A Practical Guide to Sermon Preparation.* Chicago: Moody, 1985.

Whitesell, Faris D. *Power in Expository Preaching.* Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1963.

Willhite, Keith. *Preaching with Relevance: Without Dumbing Down.* Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001.

Windsor, Paul. "Four Horizons in Preaching." *Review and Expositor* 21, no 3 (July 1997): 225-28.

York, Hershael W., and Scott A. Blue. "Is Application Necessary in the Expository Sermon?" *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 3, no. 2 (summer 1999): 70-84.

Zacharias, Ravi K. "Reaching the Happy Thinking Pagan." *Leadership* (spring 1995): 18-27.