**postmodernism**

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1. **Introduction**

* We live in strange times. Thirty years ago, Christianity was under fire because it was thought to be unscientific and consequently, untrue.
* Today, Christianity is still under fire, not because it is thought to be unscientific, but merely because it claims to be true.
* What accounts for this bizarre and growing consensus is what is called *postmodernism*
* Postmodernism, and its companion moral relativism, should be among the foremost concerns of Christians living in the 21st century.

1. **Definition**

* Postmodernism isn’t a philosophy as we typically think of philosophies. It isn’t a single, well thought out philosophical system which seeks to define and answer the big questions of life.
* Postmodernism is the mindset of Western culture in the latter half of the twentieth century.
* Postmodernism is best defined as an **"attitude"**. An attitude that celebrates the demise of reason and Absolute Truth. (Christian Scholar's Review Winter 1996).
* Postmodern ideology rejects the authority of reason and views all claims to objective truth to be dangerous

1. **Historical Background** 
   1. The Bankruptcy of Modernism

* Modernism is characterized as a movement that "delights in the natural" as opposed to the supernatural (Middleton/Walsh 14).
* It is a movement that stresses the **"individual"** and the power our **“minds”** to attain truth (Middleton/Walsh 14)
* A main tenet of modernism is that **human reason** armed with the scientific method, is the only reliable means of attaining knowledge about the universe.
* In contrast to the truth of the oral tradition in the premodern era, the modern period accepted as truth only that which could be **proven to be true**.
* It proposed a world created without any assistance from God.
  1. The Rise of Postmodernism
* Postmodernism rejects modernism' view on humanity as an ocean of individuals, postmodernists think of humans as "**social constructs**."
* Our society's values, languages, arts, entertainment define who we are.

We do not have fixed identities which are separable from our surroundings and which remain the same.

* The inescapability of seeking the supernatural
* Postmodernism is a result of the failures of modernism.

1. **Modernism vs. Postmodernism**

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| **Modernism** | **Postmodernism** |
| Reality is knowable | Reality is creatable |
| We yield to reality | We command reality |
| Reality is what it is | Reality is what you want it to be |
| Christianity is rejected because its claims are not true | Christianity is rejected because it claims to be true |
| Christ is not the only way – it is a myth | Christ is not the only way – it is arrogant |
| We can know everything without God | We cannot know anything |

1. **Characteristics of Postmodernism**
   1. The Death of Truth

* ***Rejecting objective truth is the cornerstone of postmodernism****.* In essence, postmodern ideology declares an end to all claims to truth.
* Truth is political and created by "belief communities," not discovered rationally. Reality itself turns out to be a "social construct" or paradigm
* Postmodernism cannot separate the belief from the believer.
* Rejecting the content of faith means rejecting the person holding it, because truth now means personal preference.
* It's no more appropriate to question the validity of a person's belief than to critique their choice from the dinner menu. Simply believing is justification enough.
  1. Moral relativism
* The worldview of postmodernism provides the foundation for moral relativism.
* Moral relativism is the belief that morality is relative to the person.
* Moral relativism can be summed up with the phrase: “It all depends.”
* Is murder always wrong? Relativists would say, “It depends on the circumstances.”
* Is adultery wrong? They would say, “It just depends on whether you are caught.”
  1. The Rejection of Objective Knowledge
* Knowledge is seen as uncertain, subjective, relative, and hence tentative.
* Postmodernism rejects the idea that our knowledge is an accurate representation on how thing are--of reality
  1. The assassination of words and language
* Knowledge is mediated by language, but postmodernists believe that language can't adequately convey truth.
* Words and language are just human conventions.
* But if language is what we use to convey ideas about reality, then we can't know objective reality.
* What we do with words is not to reflect reality, but rather to create it.
* This is called constructivism, the power to construct reality with our words.
* Words then, can only refer to other words and not to any "objective reality" (Carson 73)
* For Postmodernists, It's all about interpretation, not about what's real or true.
  1. Religious Pluralism
* The basic premise of religious pluralism is that no religion can assert any legitimate claim to superiority over any other religion (Carson 26).
* Pluralism advocates that God has revealed Himself in "saving ways" in other religions (Carson 27).

1. **Problems with Postmodernism**
   1. World of Chaos

* Postmodern subjectivity leads to the dangerous inference that no one can ever be wrong about what they believe.
* If we are free from the constraints of rationality, nothing separates truth from self-delusion.
* The rejection of truth leads to the rejection of standards which leads to the rejection of perspectives by which we evaluate ideas which in turn leads to a world of chaos.
  1. Loss of Meaning
* Postmodern anti-dogmatism ends up being anti-intellectual. If we can't reject a theory because it is objectively false, then the pursuit of truth is meaningless.
  1. Loss of Self
* We, Christians, have our identity in God who created us in His image.
* We are His creation made for His glory.
* According to postmodernism, you aren’t really a self at all.
* You have **no unique identity** that is identifiable from birth to death; there’s no real "you" which remains constant throughout all of life’s changes.
* Human personhood is the product of socialization, so there is no universal human essence.
* It is not we who think, speak, and act but the culture which thinks, speaks, and acts through us.

1. **Conclusion**

* We cannot embrace postmodernism, yet we must not retreat to the hills either.
* With sound Orthodox biblical teaching, we can refute the tenets of this era.
* Without being rooted in the Scriptures we will have nothing to say to postmodernism.
* Postmodernism tells us to abandon the quest for truth, yet we must humbly affirm that truth is nonetheless available. It is found in the Person of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Notes:**

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