

The Death of Truth Group Study Guide

Dennis McCallum, general editor

Contributors:

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Introduction

Western people in the 1990's are experiencing the most sweeping shift in perspective since the enlightenment. *The Death of Truth* details the dramatic and earth-shaking conversion of western society from the modernist world view to the postmodern world view. No book can take you more quickly and painlessly into the heart of the new postmodern outlook than *The Death of Truth*. You will feel the lights going on time after time as you read this easy-to-understand volume

This Study Guide is designed to help groups discuss the book section by section as members read through it on their own. Each week, appoint one discussion facilitator. The facilitator needs to carefully read the section in *The Death of Truth* for that week, and look over the discussion questions and suggested answers in the facilitator's guide ahead of time in order to offer leading thoughts. For each week, we have provided more material than you will likely be able to cover. Therefore, the facilitator should select the questions for study each week. Avoid lecture, except for short 2 to 3 minute explanations or transitions. If people discuss and struggle with these concepts they will feel more satisfaction and depth in their learning.

Encourage every participant to buy his or her own copy of *The Death of Truth*, (couples can share) and to bring them to your meetings. *The Death of Truth* is published by Bethany House Publishers, and is available through any bookstore, especially Christian bookstores. Discounted copies are also available from our Worldwide Web Site at <http://www.crossrds.org>. When the guide says to read a section from the book, ask one of the members to read aloud, while the others follow along. Reading is an easy way to help start people speaking and participating.

As written, this study could take 15 to 20 weeks to complete. If you want to shorten the number of weeks, we recommend skipping some of the "Postmodern Impact" chapters. We do not recommend skipping the first three or the last two chapters.

We have arranged each week's study so you can copy the "Discussion Guide" for your group members while giving only the facilitator the "Facilitator's guide" which

includes suggested answers. Questions asking only for personal opinion have been left without suggested answers.

The entire discussion guide is copyrighted, but you may copy it for non-commercial study purposes provided you copy and distribute at least whole weekly sections unaltered, and give credit to the authors. You may also get a **FREE** copy of the guide on-line for use in your word processor at our **Worldwide Web Site**.

Chapter 1; Are We Ready?

Discussion Guide

Have group members read, one paragraph each, through the first section (up to The New Revolution). Then discuss the questions below.

- McCallum claims that Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species* changed the course of history. Are you aware of any of these changes?
- Has your personal life ever been impacted by the doctrine of naturalistic evolution?
- Imagine trying to discuss natural selection with a group of Christians in 1865. Would they be aware of what was happening, or interested in the subject? Should they have been?
- McCallum claims the real problem is that "once again, Christians aren't ready for a major challenge to the Christian world view." What would be involved in "being ready" for the onslaught of a new world view?
- Look at the list of bulleted social features listed on page 14-17. Have you seen any of these? How do you feel about them?
- McCallum says these features aren't necessarily bad. What good can you see in any one of the bulleted items?
- What concerns to you have about any of these items?
- McCallum says, "postmodernists have no problem with religion, as long as it makes no claim to universal truth and has no authority. Look for more of the social revolution to come from the religious sector than in the past."
- Check the ones you think are correct endings to the following sentence:

Western culture today is becoming. . .

_____ more religious _____ less religious _____ about the same

_____ more Christian _____ less Christian _____ about the same

- Compare which blanks people in your group checked.
- For those who see a change, considering the trends you see, why do you think things are moving that way? Can you name more than one factor causing change? Which are the most important?

Facilitator's Guide for Chapter 1: Are we Ready?

- McCallum claims that Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species* changed the course of history. Are you aware of any of these changes?
 - Increase in atheism and agnosticism
 - Growth of theories based on Darwinian principles such as Social Darwinism, Religious Darwinism and Nazism
 - Declarations that the Bible is unscientific
- Has your personal life ever been impacted by the doctrine of naturalistic evolution?
 - Most people have faced doubt, difficulty in witnessing, and even persecution at school
- Imagine trying to discuss natural selection with a group of Christians in 1865. Would they be aware of what was happening, or interested in the subject? Should they have been?
 - Natural selection would have been very difficult for lay people to understand at the time, but those who failed to learn what it taught were unable to resist its influence
- McCallum claims the real problem is that "once again, Christians aren't ready for a major challenge to the Christian world view." What would be involved in "being ready" for the onslaught of a new world view?

Consider passages like I Peter 3:15 and Colossians 4:5,6. Consider that Paul was familiar with the false teachings of his day (Acts 17:23, 28). Would you accept someone's testimony that your view on something was wrong if it was clear that person didn't understand your view?

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- What concerns to you have about any of these items?
- McCallum says, "postmodernists have no problem with religion, as long as it makes no claim to universal truth and has no authority. Look for more of the social revolution to come from the religious sector than in the past." Check the ones you think are correct endings to the following sentence:

Compared to 15 years ago, western culture today is becoming. . .

_____ more religious _____ less religious _____ about the same

_____ more Christian _____ less Christian _____ about the same

- Compare which blanks people in your group checked.
- For those who see a change, considering the trends you see, why do you think things are moving that way? Can you name more than one factor causing change? Which are the most important?

Possible answers: Problems with the church, increased drug use, immigration, international business climate, mass media, better communications with other cultures. . .

Chapter 2

Our Old Challenge: Modernism

Discussion Guide

The chart on page 21 provides an outline of the issues discussed in chapters 2-4. Briefly review the chart, focusing on the column under modernism.

The easiest way to understand postmodernism is to see that it is a rejection or revolt against the assumptions of modernism. This chapter is arranged around the four key areas of modernist assumptions:

1. Human nature
 2. Human autonomy
 3. Human knowledge
 4. Human progress.
- As you review the chart's left column, how do you see these assumptions working out in our culture today? To help answer this question, think about each of the following four quotes:
 - "Each human being is a superbly constructed, astonishingly compact, self-ambulatory computer." Carl Sagan

What modernist assumptions are implied in this statement?

What will such assumptions lead to?

"Man must realize that a fundamental law of necessity reigns throughout the whole realm of Nature and that his existence is subject to the law of eternal struggle and strife. He will then feel that there cannot be a separate law for mankind in a world in which planets and suns follow their orbits, where moons and planets trace their destined paths, where the strong are always the masters of the weak and where those subject to such laws must obey them or be destroyed. Man must also submit to the eternal principles of this supreme wisdom. He may try to understand them but he can never free himself from their sway."

What modernist assumptions are implied in this statement?

What will such assumptions lead to?

“Nothing is in the mind that isn’t first in the senses.” Classical statement of empiricism

What modernist assumptions are implied in this statement?

What will such assumptions lead to?

“Such is the aim of the work that I have undertaken . . . to show by appeal to reason and fact that nature has set no term to the perfection of human faculties; that the perfectibility of man is truly infinite; and that the progress of this perfectibility from now onward is independent of any powers that might wish to halt it, has no other limit than the duration of the globe upon which nature has cast us.” The Marquis de Condorcet

What modernist assumptions are implied in this statement?

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- In some ways, postmodernism offers important balance to modern views. How do you think our culture has been negatively effected by these modernist ideas?

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"Each human being is a superbly constructed, astonishingly compact, self-ambulatory computer." Carl Sagan

- Modernists view people as machines. No wonder some are prepared to practice abortion and euthanasia. Compare Sagan's statement to the next quote.

"Man must realize that a fundamental law of necessity reigns throughout the whole realm of Nature and that his existence is subject to the law of eternal struggle and strife. He will then feel that there cannot be a separate law for mankind in a world in which planets and suns follow their orbits, where moons and planets trace their destined paths, where the strong are always the masters of the weak and where those subject to such laws must obey them or be destroyed. Man must also submit to the eternal principles of this supreme wisdom. He may try to understand them but he can never free himself from their sway."

- Don't tell you people until after they discuss the quote for awhile, but this quote is from Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, p. 140! Where did this mechanistic thinking about humans lead in his case?

"Nothing is in the mind that isn't first in the senses." Classical statement of empiricism

- Isn't it true that we can receive knowledge from sources other than the five senses? Can't God speak to us through spiritual conviction?
- If modernistic thinkers only know what comes to their senses, as they say, how did they find out that no one else can know anything by any other means? If you or I had a direct experience with God, a modernist observer would have no way to determine whether it was authentic using only his senses, right?
- Therefore, empiricism leads to an arrogance in the form of claiming to know the exact limits of human learning and knowledge, even though no empirical means exists for acquiring such knowledge.

“Such is the aim of the work that I have undertaken . . . to show by appeal to reason and fact that nature has set no term to the perfection of human faculties; that the perfectibility of man is truly infinite; and that the progress of this perfectibility from now onward is independent of any powers that might wish to halt it, has no other limit than the duration of the globe upon which nature has cast us.” The Marquis de Condorcet

- How has this optimism worked out? He thinks man has no limits. Have we become more aware of our limits recently?
- See the arrogance in this statement. This arrogance has offended not only postmodernists, but also theists.
- Modernism has produced unexpected negative outcomes in society. See how many your group can name.

Possible answers:

- Reducing all knowledge claims to scientific verification eliminates the possibility of knowing spiritual or moral truths.
- Human dignity lacks any meaningful basis, because as biological machines, there really isn't any difference between people and animals.
- Progress, as it is conceived by modernists, has had a disastrous effect on the environment. It has also been at the expense of native populations and given rise to colonial exploitation.
- Religion, and specifically Christianity, has been effectively pushed out of its position of respect in society. Millions have been convinced that Christianity is unscientific.

Chapter 3

Our New Challenge: *Postmodernism*

Discussion Guide

Be sure group members have read the chapter.

In this chapter we consider how postmodernism offers a response to modernist assumptions. Review the chart on page 21 focusing on the middle column, labeled "postmodernism."

Perhaps its best to think of postmodernism as *the death of truth*. Consider the statements below, taken at random from a series of recent interviews at a major university.

"Truth is whatever you believe." "No, there is no absolute truth, and if there was, how would we know what it is? . . . People who believe in absolute truth are dangerous."

- Have you encountered comments like this from your non-Christian friends?
- What barriers might such views create to evangelism?

To understand *why* people think this way, we need to understand the postmodern shift in thought. A key underlying assumption of postmodernism is how they conceive **human nature**. While modernists viewed people as autonomous (and capable of independent rational thought), postmodernists see human identity and thinking as the product of culture. Leffel states, "postmodernists deny we have a "self" that exists independent of our social reality. Culture and society *create* individuals as well as all their thoughts and attitudes." The following quote is by Peter Berger, whose analysis is often cited by postmodernists:

"A thought of any kind is grounded in society . . . The individual, then, derives his world view socially in very much the same way that he derives his roles and his identity. In other words, his emotions and his self-interpretation like his actions are predefined for him by society, and so is his cognitive approach to the universe that surrounds him."

- If "a thought of any kind is grounded in society," certain important implications follow. These implications are widely accepted in today's postmodern influenced social sciences and in popular cultural. What are these implications?
- Leffel says, "one of the main ways society shapes individuals is through language." This is probably the most abstract and difficult parts of the postmodern argument. Postmodernists point out that individuals always interact with reality through the medium of language. All mental activities, they say, are based in language. We think

in words. We communicate with words. People are connected to reality through the labels they assign to their perceptions and ideas. These labels, or words, are arbitrary, and evolve in society. The more abstract (and often more important) our ideas are, the more dependent we are on words alone to provide meaning. But if language is the way people relate to reality, then we must understand the nature of language.

Let's think about the components of language that postmodernists say makes objectivity impossible:

- *Semantics*--the meaning of words and phrases. Postmodernists say that, since societies define words, and our thinking is rooted in language, we can't go beyond a culturally relative way of knowing. Knowledge claims themselves are just a matter of cultural conditioning. Can you think of any evidence that knowledge is not necessarily limited to a given culture?
- *Syntax*--the structure or logic of language. Postmodernists say that every language has a structure, or logic. Words are related to each other by connective words such as "if/ then," "and," "either/or" and so on. Postmodernists say that the linguistic constructions for the West promote a hierarchical, "either/or" way of thinking. The language of science, logic, and progress shape the way we think. That's why we don't think *holistically* and *inclusively*. Have you heard this kind of idea before? Where?
- Do you think there is a link between the postmodern view of language and the demands of "political correctness"?
- Do you think there are broader implications to the postmodern view that language shapes thought?
- Do you think language controls what you think?

Problems with postmodern analysis:

Postmodernists rightly critique the modernists' overconfidence in autonomous human reason. However, Leffel argues that they've thrown out the baby with the bath water.

- They critique the correspondence view of truth. Postmodernists hold that all knowledge claims are arbitrary, and that none are ultimately more objective than another because we lack *certainty*. On a practical level, what's wrong with this critique?
- Imagine this discussion:
 "There is no such thing as truth"
 "Really, is that true?"
 "Yes it is"
 "Well if that's true than there's at least one true thing--your statement! So that means it's not true that there's no such thing as truth."

“But my statement is that there is no such thing as truth.”

“Okay, but then your statement isn’t true, is it?”

This conversation sounds absurd, and it is. Is the dialog between Christians and postmodernists the same or different than this discussion

- Postmodernists say all thought and reason is shaped by language. But as Leffel points out, this is inconsistent with some things we know about psychological development and the development of language. Leffel cites authorities who show that the mind is active and makes clear rational distinctions *prior to the acquisition of language*. How do these findings impact that postmodern view of linguistic cultural determinism?

Facilitator's Guide to Our New Challenge: Postmodernism

Be sure group members have read the chapter. This is the hardest chapter in the book, so be prepared for some confusion from members.

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- If "a thought of any kind is grounded in society," certain important implications follow. These implications are widely accepted in today's postmodern influenced social sciences and in popular cultural. What are these implications?
 - Possible answers:
 - Cultural relativism--the view that each culture has it's own truths that are relevant to them, but not relevant to other cultures. Consequently, it's inappropriate to judge the actions of other cultures.
 - Postmodern rejection of personal autonomy leads to a view of people reminiscent of the modernist who contended that humans are

impersonal biological machines. What kind of impact might this have on areas like medical ethics?

- Culture provides and interpretative grid on perceptions that makes the modernist idea of rational objectivity impossible. When people think they are being rational, they are really just living out their western cultural bias.
- Leffell says, “one of the main ways society shapes individuals is through language.” This is probably the most abstract and difficult parts of the postmodern argument. Postmodernists point out that individuals always interact with reality through the medium of language. All mental activities, they say, are based in language. We think in words. We communicate with words. People are connected to reality through the labels they assign to their perceptions and ideas. These labels, or words, are arbitrary, and evolve in society. The more abstract (and often more important) our ideas are, the more dependent we are on words alone to provide meaning. But if language is the way people relate to reality, then we must understand the nature of language.

Let’s think about the components of language that postmodernists say makes objectivity impossible:

- *Semantics*--the meaning of words and phrases. Postmodernists say that, since societies define words, and our thinking is rooted in language, we can’t go beyond a culturally relative way of knowing. Knowledge claims themselves are just a matter of cultural conditioning. Can you think of any evidence that knowledge is not necessarily limited to a given culture?
 - How do some members of a given culture come up with new ideas not found in their culture?
 - How do foreign missions ever succeed?
- *Syntax*--the structure or logic of language. Postmodernists say that every language has a structure, or logic. Words are related to each other by connective words such as “if/ then,” “and,” “either/or” and so on. Postmodernists say that the linguistic constructions for the West promote a hierarchical, “either/or” way of thinking. The language of science, logic, and progress shape the way we think. That’s why we don’t think *holistically* and *inclusively*. Have you heard this kind of idea before? Where?
- Do you think there is a link between the postmodern view of language and the demands of “political correctness”?

- Possible answers:
- The movement to make language “gender neutral” is one example of the linkage between postmodern views of language and postmodern political activism.
- By attempting to restructure language, people will lose their “patriarchal” prejudices. What do you think of this? What implications do you see?
- Do you think there are broader implications to the postmodern view that language shapes thought?
 - Some implications are: All “truths” are merely linguistic constructs. We are trapped in the “prison house of language.” What we believe doesn’t have any real connection to reality--we simply think in the framework of our language. We can’t check the map against the territory.
- Do you think language controls what you think?

Problems with postmodern analysis:

Postmodernists rightly critique the modernists’ overconfidence in autonomous human reason. However, Leffel argues that they’ve thrown out the baby with the bath water.

- They critique the correspondence view of truth. Postmodernists hold that all knowledge claims are arbitrary, and that none are ultimately more objective than another because we lack *certainty*. On a practical level, what’s wrong with this critique?
 - Possible answers:
 - Remember the point that all cultures use scientific modes of reasoning, even the so-called primitive cultures. How does this respond to the postmodern view that “scientific reasoning” is a Western cultural paradigm?
 - Isn’t the postmodern view based on reason, or at least put itself forth as an objectively true theory? Since this is so, it seems that the denial of reason and truth is self defeating:

Imagine this discussion:

“There is no such thing as truth”

“Really, is that true?”

“Yes it is”

“Well if that’s true than there's at least one true thing--your statement! So that means it’s not true that there’s no such thing as truth.”

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- This conversation sounds absurd, and it is. Is the dialog between Christians and postmodernists the same or different than this discussion
- Postmodernists say all thought and reason is shaped by language. But as Leffel points out, this is inconsistent with some things we know about psychological development and the development of language. Leffel cites authorities who show that the mind is active and makes clear rational distinctions *prior to the acquisition of language*. How do these findings impact that postmodern view of linguistic cultural determinism?
 - These findings directly refute the postmodern notion that all thought is based on language. While language may have an *influence* on how we think, we have evidence that the relationship of reason to language is different than how postmodernists say it is. In McIntyre’s words, “words are a sort of a handle on concepts” that we have already come to know independent of language.

Chapter 4

Postmodernism and "The Myth of Progress": Two Visions

Discussion Guide for Two Visions

This chapter makes the distinction between two types of postmodernism: skeptical and affirmative. Both types of postmodernism reject the possibility of rational objectivity. In the place of reason, they say we are left with nothing but power.

Skeptical Postmodernists

Skeptical postmodernists claim that when people make claims to ultimate truth, usually religious or philosophical, the one thing we can count on is that it will be used to justify self interest and power. Among the examples Leffel cites are: so-called "Manifest Destiny" and the alleged inferiority of African Americans. These are example of what postmodernists call "epistemological tyranny."

- What does "epistemological tyranny" mean? What other examples of epistemological tyranny can you think of?
- Leffel cites contemporary music and cinema as examples of skeptical postmodernism. Discuss song lyrics and movies you've see that carry the cynical view that skeptical postmodernists hold.

Affirmative Postmodernism

- Affirmatives are sometimes referred to as "constructivists." What does this term mean? Can you think of any good examples of constructivism?
 - Talk about examples like the gay rights movement and how they manipulate public opinion by creating words like "homophobia." By inventing this kind of language, they seek to create a new paradigm for social morality, without seriously engaging the deeper moral issues. We just label people "homophobes" if they have problems with the ethics of homosexuality.
- Where and to what extent do you see constructivism in the university today? Do we see constructivism in other areas of culture too?

- Get the group to talk about what they find in literature classes, political science and other related fields. There will be many illustrations of constructivism from the university environment and the curriculum.
- You could also discuss the recent motion pictures, *The Scarlet Letter* and *Nixon* as affirmative, or ideological reworkings of history and literature.
- In this chapter, Leffel makes a distinction between postmodern ideology and postmodern culture. We can pick up postmodern ideology through comments and sentiments people express. Postmodern-influenced people will often say, "Intuition and feelings might tell us more about reality than does reason"
 "People do what they do because their culture made them what they are (we are cultural constructs)
 "Government is nothing but a bunch of self-serving politicians. They'll never really serve the people"
 "The legal system is set up to cater to the rich and powerful. You can't get justice if you're a minority or poor."
 "No one knows what really happened in history, because people have burned the accounts they didn't want to pass along"
 "You don't look to religion for objective answers. It's just a matter of personal belief and what works best for you."

Discuss these views in the group. To what extent does the group identify with them? Why or why not? Is it possible some statements might have both a bad and a good component? What would be a biblical view of these thoughts?

Facilitator's Guide to Two Visions

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- What does “epistemological tyranny” mean? What other examples of epistemological tyranny can you think of?
 - "White man's burden" as used by colonial powers
 - "Scientism" is the view that nothing but the findings of empirical science are valid
 - Postmodernism is also epistemological tyranny, because it discounts all other views.
- Leffel cites contemporary music and cinema as examples of skeptical postmodernism. Discuss song lyrics and movies you’ve see that carry the cynical view that skeptical postmodernists hold.

Affirmative Postmodernism

- Affirmatives are sometimes referred to as “constructivists.” What does this term mean? Can you think of any good examples of constructivism?
 - Talk about examples like the gay rights movement and how they manipulate public opinion by creating words like “homophobia.” By inventing this kind of language, they seek to create a new paradigm for social morality, without seriously engaging the deeper moral issues. We just label people “homophobes” if they have problems with the ethics of homosexuality. Try to think of other examples.
- Where and to what extent do you see constructivism in the university today? Do we see constructivism in other areas of culture too?

- Get the group to talk about what they find in literature classes, political science and other related fields. There will be many illustrations of constructivism from the university environment and the curriculum.
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Chapter 5

Postmodern Impact: Health Care

Discussion Guide for Health Care

1. There are many different types of alternative medicines. Which ones have you experienced, or are familiar with? What the underlying assumptions and beliefs of these practices?
2. Dr. O'Mathúna notes that modern medicine has tended to give the impression that health is the result of physical processes only. What are the problems with viewing health as purely physical? How have promoters of alternative medicine used postmodern ideas to capitalize on this weakness in modern medicine?
3. Jean Watson, President of the National League for Nursing for 1995-7, wrote: "Nursing, like all other disciplines, must now yield to a postmodern approach, . . . realizing that in this postmodern time, science, knowledge, and even images of nursing, health, environment, person become one among many truth games" (*Nursing Science Quarterly* 8 (1995): 60-4). What does she mean by this? What are the implications of her view?
4. According to the TV news program, "Day One" (8/22/95), thousands of people contracted a disease called EMS from contaminants in the health-food product L-tryptophan--an herbal product. There is as yet no cure for this painful disease which to date has led to 36 deaths. Dr. O'Mathúna predicts we will hear more stories like this if postmodern ideas are used to promote medical products and procedures. Why might he think this?
5. Dr. O'Mathúna argues against using anecdotal evidence and personal experience as a way to validate medical treatments. What is the difference between what he is critiquing and simply getting advice from others based on their experiences (which he would recommend doing, especially in medical matters)?
6. Some people who practice therapeutic touch claim that God is their source of healing, not *prana*. Thus, they see no problems with Christians practicing therapeutic touch. Would you agree with this position? What biblical passages or principles would you use to support your conclusion?
7. Dr. O'Mathúna pointed out that practitioners of alternative medicine often encourage people to just try their methods and see if they help. "What harm could there be in that?" they rhetorically ask! Well, what harm *could* there be in just checking out some of these practices? Are there any practices you think Christians should be especially careful to avoid? Why?

8. The ideas behind some types of alternative medicines are based on insight and revelation received during meditation and altered states of consciousness. Many others place great emphasis on intuition. For example, Engebretson and Wardell state, “The patient should be encouraged to trust her or his own intuition and judgment” about alternative healing methods and practitioners (*Nurse Practitioner* 18 (1993): 51-5). Use, for example, Jeremiah 23:26-17, 25-32 and Ezekiel 13:2-3 to develop a biblical response to this notion.

9. In her book on New Age experiences (*Testing the Spirits*, InterVarsity Press, 1995), Elizabeth L. Hillstrom notes that the early stages of Eastern-style meditation often includes a variety of physiological experiences. “They may include rapturous feelings, electrifying thrills and chills that move through the body, sensations of tingling, prickling, intense heat or cold, or of bugs crawling on the skin” (p. 120). Do you see any connection between these and the experiences reported by practitioners of therapeutic touch?

10. The Spiritual Emergence Network is a New Age organization with 1100 trained counselors operating out of 40 centers around the U.S. Its primary purpose is to support and counsel people through what are called “spiritual emergencies.” These are seen as emotional and spiritual crises which have the potential to lead either to severe depression and further emotional problems, or to greater spiritual enlightenment. This organization wants to help people have the latter outcome. People experience these crises after starting meditation or any practice which brings them “into more direct and conscious relationship to their own life force, or *prana* in Sanskrit” (Emma Bragdon, *The Call of Spiritual Emergency*, Harper & Row, 1990, p. 5). What does the existence of this group tell you about the nature of meditation? What implications would this have for practitioners and receivers of *prana*-based practices like Ayurvedic Medicine and therapeutic touch?

Chapter 6

Postmodern Impact: Literature

Discussion Guide for Literature

Review the chart on p. 87. Focus on the section under the heading "grammatical-historical approach."

- Think about the Bible as a text. What are the main questions we ask of a biblical passage to get at its meaning.
- Why do we approach the Bible this way? Isn't it because we think that if we ask questions about the author, audience and the context of a passage, we can discover the author's intent and therefore the true meaning of the text? But postmodernists step in at this point and say that we're operating from a faulty paradigm. They say our assumptions about author, text and reader are wrong. Again review the chart on p. 87. This time focus on the column under Let's explore this a bit further.

The author

- Why do postmodernists argue that the author doesn't stand over the text as an authority?
- Do you think that postmodernists have some important insight when they say that the authors' writing reflects the biases, values and beliefs of their culture? What examples come to mind? How might this effect the way we view scripture?

The text

One of the big problems many postmodernists have with texts is that they "privilege" certain values and ideas over others. Since values and truth claims are social constructs, texts that are "privileged" (accepted into the social and literary canon) perpetuate views that keep power for the dominant culture while marginalizing minority cultures.

- Is this viewpoint familiar to you? Where have you come into contact with it? Do you think this outlook perpetuates cynicism? How so?
- How might the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution be viewed in terms of privileging certain values that perpetuate power at the expense of minority cultures?

The reader

One of the tools postmodernists use to wrestle authority out of the text and into the reader is “deconstruction.” Deconstruction purges texts of socially constructed hierarchies, contradictions and identifies things excluded from the text.

- Why is being “logocentric” such a concern for deconstruction? What does this mean?
- How does using deconstruction allow the reader to be an authority over the text?
- Postmodernists say that in the final analysis, no one has final authority over the text. Why is this? What is the consequence of this view?

Facilitator's Guide for Literature

Review the chart on p. 87. Focus on the section under the heading "grammatical-historical approach."

- Think about the Bible as a text. What are the main questions we ask of a biblical passage to get at its meaning.

Consider questions like:

- Who is the author?
- Who was the original audience?
- What historical factors about the audience might be important in understanding the passage?
- What is the broader context of the passage being studied?
- What words or concepts in the passage relate to central biblical teachings
- Why do we approach the Bible this way? Isn't it because we think that if we ask questions about the author, audience and the context of a passage, we can discover the author's intent and therefore the true meaning of the text? But postmodernists step in at this point and say that we're operating from a faulty paradigm. They say our assumptions about author, text and reader are wrong. Again review the chart on p. 87. This time focus on the column under Let's explore this a bit further.

The author

- Why do postmodernists argue that the author doesn't stand over the text as an authority?
 - For the discussion leader: Because authors are merely an expression of the cultural context that shapes their thought, values and beliefs. So there is nothing original being stated in the text. The text is merely an

expression of the author's social reality. And that reality may or may not be relevant to the reader.

- Do you think that postmodernists have some important insight when they say that the authors' writing reflects the biases, values and beliefs of their culture? What examples come to mind? How might this effect the way we view scripture?

The text

One of the big problems many postmodernists have with texts is that they "privilege" certain values and ideas over others. Since values and truth claims are social constructs, texts that are "privileged" (accepted into the social and literary canon) perpetuate views that keep power for the dominant culture while marginalizing minority cultures.

- Is this viewpoint familiar to you? Where have you come into contact with it? Do you think this outlook perpetuates cynicism? How so?
- How might the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution be viewed in terms of privileging certain values that perpetuate power at the expense of minority cultures?
 - Property rights included ownership of human slaves. "One man, one vote," meant "One man, but not one woman."
 - Rights under the constitution only applied to citizens, not to Native Americans.
 - But at the extreme, see revisionist judges who feel we have to read the constitution as it would be understood today, not then. Under this premise they invent new meanings never considered by the framers.

The reader

One of the tools postmodernists use to wrestle authority out of the text and into the reader is "deconstruction." Deconstruction purges texts of socially constructed hierarchies, contradictions and identifies things excluded from the text.

- Why is being "logocentric" such a concern for deconstruction? What does this mean?
 - People are logocentric when they believe there are controlling ideas that are objectively true. People who favor one point of view as the "right" one are said to be logocentric by postmodernists.
- How does using deconstruction allow the reader to be an authority over the text?

- The reader discerns what antitheses were at work in the original writing.
The reader determines what the author's real motives were, and why he believed as he did.
- Postmodernists say that in the final analysis, no one has final authority over the text.
Why is this? What is the consequence of this view?
 - They claim that the individual only has authority over what the text means to him or her, not to what it might mean to others.
 - Texts' meanings can change depending on the reader.

Chapter 7

The Postmodern Method: Education

Discussion Guide

- In the following list, check those examples of postmodern educational trends you feel you may have seen in your own child's school system. Then compare your list with the other group members.
 - Multicultural education
 - Outcome-Based-Education
 - Afrocentric schools
 - Constructivism
 - Critical pedagogy
 - Self-esteem emphasis

- How has this chapter affected your view of these educational emphases?

- Many Christians argue for "value-free" education in the public schools. They say teachers should simply teach students facts and leave the ethics and belief systems to parents in the home. Other Christians hold that "value-free" education is impossible. For example, forbidding cheating, requiring academic performance, etc. are necessary for the educational process, but they are values/ethics. What place do you think values, religious/philosophical beliefs, and ethics have in public education?

- What are the similarities and differences between the postmodernists' espousal of Afrocentric schools and Christians' espousal of Christian schools?

Consider the following passage by a science educator and then give your opinion on the questions that follow:

“The study of science and related technology often requires students to adapt to a white male culture, to an Eurocentric/androcentric world view. The basic assumptions of science, as it is taught to American children in textbooks, focus on male as opposed to female and on European as opposed to Eastern or African or South American ways of viewing the world. The axiological and epistemological beliefs of textbook science are tied to a European or white male way of viewing the world. This culture values competitiveness and individual achievement. Most modern science instruction is based on principles of realism. This value system holds that there is an ultimate truth and that humans discover this truth in the natural world. The Eurocentric foundation of science focuses on European (and on those of European descent) values, attitudes and ways of knowing.”

- What postmodern ideas are evident in this passage?

- What are these female and non-European views of truth that the author claims to be different than “realism”? Do women, men, Europeans, Africans, etc., *as groups*, view truth differently?
- Is it true - wholly or partially - that science is merely a white, European, male, worldview and therefore scientific knowledge is infected with this bias?
- Are competitiveness and individualism in education a result of white European male influence? What does the Bible say about competitiveness and individualism that is relevant to schooling?
- How would education be different, if at all, if women and non-Europeans were in control of it? Who should control the education system?
- To what extent is it true, if at all, that students “must assimilate” a certain instructional model in order to be successful at school? How might postmodern education change this?

Consider this passage, also from Barba:

“Sometimes teachers believe that culturally diverse children do not excel because they come from families and communities that do not properly prepare students for learning. Teachers occasionally believe that some students do not care if they do well in school, and that these students are not properly prepared to succeed in an academic environment and are not motivated to learn. The cultural deficit model as described by Sleeter and Grant (1990) assumes that schools should change learners, should help them assimilate to mainstream culture, including the “culture of science.” From this viewpoint, children need remedial work to compensate for their lack of knowledge, skills, and attitudes in science and mathematics. Those who advocate the use of this world view regard students as being “at risk” when they do not share American mainstream language and culture. The National Science Foundation pipeline approach typifies this world view. If we just call the plumber, if we just plug the leaks, then we can “fix the students.

In contrast to the deficit model, those who adhere to a multicultural model (Sleeter & Grant, 1990) see the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of diverse students as being valuable educational resources. A ‘multicultural approach to education promotes cultural pluralism and social equality by reforming the school program for all students to make it reflect diversity’ (Sleeter & Grant, 1990, p. 139). If one adopts this world view, children who speak a primary language other than English are considered an asset in the classroom because they have constructed a knowledge of science in a different sociocultural context than others in the class and thus bring added resources to the classroom. Those who

advocate the use of a multicultural approach to education see diversity as a strength in the classroom, as a vehicle for increasing the learning of all students.” (ibid., pp. 12-13).

- What postmodern theories and attitudes are evident in this passage?
- For someone who does not believe that the schools should “change learners,” what, then, would the school’s job be? What is a biblical perspective on the task of schools (including the job of “fixing” students)?
- To what extent is diversity a “deficit” and to what extent is it a “valuable educational resource”?
- Which “world view” - the “deficit” or the “multicultural” - is closest to the biblical world view? Or, is there a preferable third alternative?

Here is one more quotation from Barba:

“Students cannot be “fixed” in the way that flat tires are fixed on automobiles. Rather, what is needed is a view of students and schools which affirms everyone. First, we must begin with an assumption that students are not deficient but rather bring a wealth of knowledge of the world around them to the classroom and to their academic endeavors. Second, we must allow students to bring their culture and experiences to each new learning experience. We must affirm our students to assist them in adding knowledge to that which they already possess.” (ibid., pp. 19-20).

- Why do you think this author believes that it is important to assume that students are not “deficient”? Do you agree that this is an important assumption?
- Is it possible, and if so how, to have education without ever telling students they are “deficient”? What would be the result of this kind of classroom atmosphere?
- Is it necessary to be affirmed in order to learn? Why or why not?

Facilitator's Manual for Education

- In the following list, check those examples of postmodern educational trends you feel you may have seen in your own child's school system. Then compare your list with the other group members.
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 - Outcome-Based-Education
 - Afrocentric schools
 - Constructivism
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 - Self-esteem emphasis

- How has this chapter affected your view of these educational emphases?

- Many Christians argue for "value-free" education in the public schools. They say teachers should simply teach students facts and leave the ethics and belief systems to parents in the home. Other Christians hold that "value-free" education is impossible. For example, forbidding cheating, requiring academic performance, etc. are necessary for the educational process, but they are values/ethics. What place do you think values, religious/philosophical beliefs, and ethics have in public education?

- What are the similarities and differences between the postmodernists' espousal of Afrocentric schools and Christians' espousal of Christian schools?
 - Christian schools are privately funded
 - Christian schools are not based on race but on a religious point of view
 - Christian schools are often open to non-Christians

Consider the following passage by a science educator and then give your opinion on the questions that follow:

"The study. . .

- What postmodern ideas are evident in this passage?

- Science and technology are western cultural biases.
 - Rationality and linear thinking is male.
 - Whether a particular scientific proposition is true or false is never considered--only that it reflects male European thinking.
 - Competition and individual achievement are European and male.
 - Believe that there is a real objective world is male and European
- What are these female and non-European views of truth that the author claims to be different than “realism”? Do women, men, Europeans, Africans, etc., *as groups*, view truth differently?
 - The question is not whether there are differences between women and men or between ethnic groups. The question is whether they view truth differently.
 - If there are differences between one group and another on how they view truth, what is the solution? Different “truths” for each group, or that one or both groups are wrong?
 - Is it true - wholly or partially - that science is merely a white, European, male, worldview and therefore scientific knowledge is infected with this bias?
 - Are competitiveness and individualism in education a result of white European male influence? What does the Bible say about competitiveness and individualism that is relevant to schooling?
 - How would education be different, if at all, if women and non-Europeans were in control of it? Who should control the education system?
 - To what extent is it true, if at all, that students “must assimilate” a certain instructional model in order to be successful at school? How might postmodern education change this?

Consider this passage, also from Barba:

“Sometimes teachers. . .

- What postmodern theories and attitudes are evident in this passage?
- For someone who does not believe that the schools should “change learners,” what, then, would the school’s job be? What is a biblical perspective on the task of schools (including the job of “fixing” students)?

Go around the room and have people read these verses as part of your discussion

(Prov 10:13 NIV) Wisdom is found on the lips of the discerning, but a rod is for the back of him who lacks judgment.

(Prov 13:24 NIV) He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him.

(Prov 22:15 NIV) Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him.

(Prov 23:13 NIV) Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die.

(Prov 23:14 NIV) Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death.

(Prov 29:15 NIV) The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother.

- To what extent is diversity a “deficit” and to what extent is it a “valuable educational resource”?

A classroom where people are so diverse they cannot understand each other’s language is ill-suited to learning. Students need sufficient common ground in their suppositions to be able to communicate.

- Which “world view” - the “deficit” or the “multicultural” - is closest to the biblical world view? Or, is there a preferable third alternative?

Here is one more quotation from Barba:

“Students cannot be. . .

- Why do you think this author believes that it is important to assume that students are not “deficient”? Do you agree that this is an important assumption?

This belief is based on the notion that what we believe *creates* reality. In truth, some students are deficient, and denying this only endangers those students. Many students do need remedial classes and there is no proof that such classes ruin those who take them. This approach is similar to Christian Science--“If I deny I am sick, I will be well.”

- Is it possible, and if so how, to have education without ever telling students they are “deficient”? What would be the result of this kind of classroom atmosphere?

This approach could unintentionally teach children that they are never wrong. It could definitely lead to difficulties when those students later are

directly confronted with their mistakes and are not used to such honesty. It could weaken students' character. It also robs the pleasure from being right, which could sap motivation.

- Is it necessary to be affirmed in order to learn? Why or why not?

Students need a *mixture* of affirmation and correction depending on their performance. Instruction without any affirmation does break down because of loss of motivation.

Chapter 8

The Postmodern Method: History

Discussion Guide

- Dixon says, “The facts of history are becoming more flexible and can be bent to accommodate almost any argument.” Have you seen any examples of this? How about Oliver Stone’s movies, *JFK* and *Nixon*?
- Dixon thinks the historical events in the Bible are the lynch-pin of Christianity? Is this overstated, in your opinion?
- Marxism sees socioeconomic classes, such as the Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat in a desperate class struggle that shapes and explains history. What, if any, connection do you see between Marxist thought and postmodernism?
- Black Studies, Women's Studies, Gay and Lesbian studies, Hispanic Studies, etc. form a large part of any contemporary university bulletin. How do you feel about these course offerings? Is there anything wrong with offering such courses?
- Do you believe women have been oppressed more than others in history?
- Dixon says, “Postmodern scholars point out that each person has her own world-view, her own beliefs and convictions. Therefore, which lines we draw between the facts of history and the resulting picture we develop is ultimately dependent on individual judgment.” How would you answer this claim? How does Dixon answer it?
- Are some events or “facts” of history more important than others? If so, what makes something important? Would we consider some things important in the west that are considered unimportant in other cultures? If so, what implications would you see in such an observation?

Facilitator's Manual for History

- Dixon says, “The facts of history are becoming more flexible and can be bent to accommodate almost any argument.” Have you seen any examples of this? How about Oliver Stone’s movies, *JFK* and *Nixon*?
 - Both JFK and Nixon have been heavily criticized for altering the facts of history. Oliver Stone replies that “history is open.”
 - Lewis Farrakahn claimed that Napoleon blasted the nose off the Sphinx in Egypt “because it reminded him of the majesty of the black man.”
- Dixon thinks the historical events in the Bible are the lynch-pin of Christianity? Is this overstated, in your opinion?
 - How many times does God call himself “the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” or “the God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage?”
 - Read the first half of I Corinthians 15. How much importance does Paul attach to historical fact?
- Marxism sees socioeconomic classes, such as the Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat in a desperate class struggle that shapes and explains history. What, if any, connection do you see between Marxist thought and postmodernism?
 - Postmodernism sees a similar struggle going on between sexes, races, cultures and those with different sexual preferences.
 - As with Marxism, oppression of the weak by the strong is the key to understanding history
- Black Studies, Women's Studies, Gay and Lesbian studies, Hispanic Studies, etc. form a large part of any contemporary university bulletin. How do you feel about these course offerings? Is there anything wrong with offering such courses?
- Do you believe women have been oppressed more than others in history?
 - A fair study of history demonstrates that they have been more oppressed by a wide margin over men.
 - Examples include
 - foot-binding in China
 - clitorectomies in Islamic countries
 - beatings “balks” and dunking in Europe for women who sassed a man
 - the “rule of thumb” which refers to the rule in colonial America that

restricted men to beat their wives with canes no thicker than their thumb.

- Dixon says, “Postmodern scholars point out that each person has her own world-view, her own beliefs and convictions. Therefore, which lines we draw between the facts of history and the resulting picture we develop is ultimately dependent on individual judgment.” How would you answer this claim? How does Dixon answer it?
- Are some events or “facts” of history more important than others? If so, what makes something important?
 - Frequency of mention by contemporaries or a clear cause and effect link between an event and major changes that affect many people. For instance, Alexander the Great’s campaign into the middle East brought down the Persian empire.
 - Events or discoveries that are still considered important or influential long afterward to many people can be assumed to be important.
- Would we consider some things important in the west that are considered unimportant in other cultures? If so, what implications would you see in such an observation?
 - Events could be globally important (like the discovery of flight) or locally important (like the founding of the Massachusetts bay colony). Because some things are of local or regional importance should not be taken to imply that the concept of “importance” is meaningless.

Chapter 9

The Postmodern Method: Psychotherapy

Discussion Guide

- Dr. Fidelibus says that being of “many minds” is a way to deal with diversity in our culture. Studies show that immigration and other religions are on a rapid rise in the U.S. In your view, will being of many minds bring us together, or keep us separate?
- “Family therapists define the “family” as a culture.” Knowing what postmodernists think of the social construction of reality, you can imagine that postmodern family therapists see everyone’s actions and attitudes as have been produced by their families. Are we products of our families? To what extent? Can you think of any evidence that people are not completely determined by their family of origin?
- Dr. Fidelibus says, “Modernist counseling approaches in psychology have long assumed, as postmodernists do, that the ways patients see themselves aren’t objectively true. . . However, they further assume, unlike postmodernists, that the patient will become well by developing a more objective--or truer--self-appraisal through the process of therapy.” In other words, modernist counselors may conclude that a client is not seeing reality correctly, which suggests neurosis or worse. Postmodern therapists, on the other hand, start with the assumption that the client’s reality *is* reality for that client. Have you seen this approach in counseling you, or friends of yours, have undergone?
- Postmodern therapy “will involve no similar effort to confront or correct the patient's narrative.” What does this mean in the context of radical victimology?
- According to Dr. Fidelibus, “The loss of self-identity has been associated with some of the most unsettling findings in the entire psychology research literature.” Why is this a concern with postmodern-influenced therapies?
- “Studies have repeatedly found that we tend to attribute our own successes to positive internal traits, such as ability and effort, and our failures to external factors outside of our control. By contrast, we tend to attribute the successes of others to “luck,” and their failures to inability, lack of perseverance, or some other personal shortcoming.” Based on this observation, Dr. Fidelibus concludes, “Self-sacrifice isn't merely a pious euphemism or an exhortation to ‘be nice’ or ‘do good.’ It's an *epistemological necessity*--a pre-requisite to knowing what is true.” Explain why he thinks this. How would postmodernists view self-sacrifice?

Facilitator's Manual for Psychotherapy

- Dr. Fidelibus says that being of “many minds” is a way to deal with diversity in our culture. Studies show that immigration and other religions are on a rapid rise in the U.S. In your view, will being of many minds bring us together, or keep us separate?
 - As the right to maintain a different “mind” becomes an inviolable right, this approach could well rob us of any common ground from which to understand or to engage with each other.
- “Family therapists define the "family" as a culture.” Knowing what postmodernists think of the social construction of reality, you can imagine that postmodern family therapists see everyone’s actions and attitudes as have been produced by their families. Are we products of our families? To what extent? Can you think of any evidence that people are not completely determined by their family of origin?
 - How do we explain when brothers or sisters raised in the same family turn out very differently?
 - How do some people turn completely against the way they were raised, or utterly depart from the culture in which they were raised?
- Dr. Fidelibus says, “Modernist counseling approaches in psychology have long assumed, as postmodernists do, that the ways patients see themselves aren’t objectively true. . . However, they further assume, unlike postmodernists, that the patient will become well by developing a more objective--or truer--self-appraisal through the process of therapy.” In other words, modernist counselors may conclude that a client is not seeing reality correctly, which suggests neurosis or worse. Postmodern therapists, on the other hand, start with the assumption that the client’s reality *is* reality for that client. Have you seen this approach in counseling you, or friends of yours, have undergone?
- Postmodern therapy “will involve no similar effort to confront or correct the patient's narrative.” What does this mean in the context of radical victimology?
 - In postmodern victimology, the victim’s feelings and perceptions are his or her reality. Therefore, we cannot question whether those who feel they were abused or harassed actually were mistreated in the "real" world, or whether their abuse was a matter of their own interpretation.
- According to Dr. Fidelibus, “The loss of self-identity has been associated with some of the most unsettling findings in the entire psychology research literature.” Why is this a concern with postmodern-influenced therapies?
 - Postmodern therapies claim that people are purely the product of their socially constructed reality. All that they are and think is not their own,

but was imparted to them by their culture. Therefore, there is no concrete "self."

- “Studies have repeatedly found that we tend to attribute our own successes to positive internal traits, such as ability and effort, and our failures to external factors outside of our control. By contrast, we tend to attribute the successes of others to "luck," and their failures to inability, lack of perseverance, or some other personal shortcoming.” Based on this observation, Dr. Fidelibus concludes, “Self-sacrifice isn't merely a pious euphemism or an exhortation to ‘be nice’ or ‘do good.’ It's an *epistemological necessity*--a pre-requisite to knowing what is true.” Explain why he thinks this. How would postmodernists view self-sacrifice?
 - Unless we have a mind-set of self-sacrifice, we will constantly distort reality in our favor. Spiritual growth is intended to decrease this tendency, as Christians see life less self-centeredly and more through God's perspective.

Chapter 10

The Postmodern Method: Law

Discussion Guide

- Did the Rodney King trials ever make you wonder whether justice is based on race?
- Why do you think the majority of people in jails are African American?
- Saalmon points out that traditional legal theory argues for the “Rule of Law.” Postmodernists claim that there is no such thing as the rule of law because all laws have to be interpreted and applied by people. How would you respond to this point?
- Recent study shows that crack cocaine users are far more likely to be arrested than are users of regular cocaine. Many observers claim that this proves the law operates under racism. After all, most crack users are black and poor, while most users of regular cocaine are middle class whites. How would you respond to these findings?
- Critical legal theorists claim that judges wear robes and use archaic language in order to gain wrongful legitimation. Why do you think they wear robes? Are such traditions sinister?
- Saalmon quotes Stanley Fish as saying, “Does might make right? In a sense the answer I might give is yes, since in the absence of a perspective independent of interpretation some interpretive perspective will always rule by virtue of having won out over its competitors.” If this is true, what can minorities expect in the future? What could hold out hope for minorities?

Facilitator's Manual for Law

- Did the Rodney King trials ever make you wonder whether justice is based on race?
- Why do you think the majority of people in jails are African American?
- Saalmon points out that traditional legal theory argues for the “Rule of Law.” Postmodernists claim that there is no such thing as the rule of law because all laws have to be interpreted and applied by people. How would you respond to this point?
 - Courts serve as checks and balances for each other to an extent, through the appeals system.
 - It is certainly possible that laws could be interpreted unfairly. Many evangelicals believe this occurred in the case of *Rowe vs. Wade*. However, even though laws can be abused, a system without laws would be even worse.
- Recent study shows that crack cocaine users are far more likely to be arrested than are users of regular cocaine. Many observers claim that this proves the law operates under racism. After all, most crack users are black and poor, while most users of regular cocaine are middle class whites. How would you respond to these findings?
 - Racism is certainly one good possible explanation
 - - Racism is one very good possible explanation
 - Because crack is a cheaper high, it is associated with poor people, and poverty in turn has long been associated with crime. Since more African Americans are poor, it is not surprising that they more often are arrested in conjunction with other crimes, and are found to be in possession of crack.
 - Wealthier white cocaine users are better able to hide their activities from police than the poor. Crack abuse remains a street crime, more liable to discovery. Note: Even if these last two explanations are correct, racism may be a factor in why proportionately more blacks are poor.
- Critical legal theorists claim that judges wear robes and use archaic language in order to gain wrongful legitimation. Why do you think they wear robes? Are such traditions sinister?
- Saalmon quotes Stanley Fish as saying, “Does might make right? In a sense the answer I might give is yes, since in the absence of a perspective independent of interpretation some interpretive perspective will always rule by virtue of having won out over its competitors.” If this is true, what can minorities expect in the future? What could hold out hope for minorities?

- Majority culture can always “win out” against other viewpoints if all is purely a matter of power, as Fish claims. Minorities should resist this sort of thinking with all their might.
- Only objective universally binding ethical values will guarantee fairness for minorities, and this is the very thing postmodernism denies. Many authorities, like Gene Veith, have worried that postmodernism could lead to fascism.

Chapter 11

The Postmodern Method: Science

Discussion Guide

- When discussing Kuhn's and Feyerabend's work, Dr. Campbell refers to "paradigms." Have you heard people using this word more lately? When postmodernists use the term, a paradigm is a model within which one set of truths hold. Other paradigms have their own sets of truths. In other words, a paradigm is similar to the idea of a cultural "reality" or, to use terminology from literary theory, a paradigm is similar to a social "text" or "story." However, postmodernists aren't the only ones who use the term paradigm. How might people use the term paradigm without loading it with postmodern ideology?
- Dr. Campbell names several features used in scientific research intended to reduce bias and enhance objectivity. He included replication, blind testing, peer review and falsifiability. Do you think these aspects of research promise that scientific research will be relatively objective? How might each fail to do what it was intended to do?
- Dr. Campbell says, "This is a contradiction within modernism: Their conclusions are supposed to be based on reason and observation, not on faith. Yet, confidence in things like observation require faith. They end up using faith, even as they argue against faith." Could you articulate this point to a sharp, learned modernist? Write a list of questions that would lead a modernist thinker to see this contradiction.
- Dr. Campbell quotes Renee Weber when she says, "Science as it is used in this book stands for the attitude of Einstein rather than of Bacon: an attitude of kinship with nature rather than of exploitive power over her." Can you think of any movies or books that have portrayed science as primarily an exploiter and destroyer of nature?
- In this chapter, Dr. Feyerabend suggests that science has no more legitimacy or authority than other approaches to reality, like magic. How would you respond to such a claim?

Facilitator's Guide for Science

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Before postmodernism, a paradigm was a model, or a way of approaching an area of thought. For instance, people who believed the world was flat, had a collection of reasons for that belief, and found it difficult to accept evidence that the world was round. After all, the horizon on the ocean was flat, water didn't run off the surface of the world, etc. After the world was shown to be round, these people experienced a paradigm shift--they had to change not only the way they viewed the world from flat to round, but also all the associated factors they earlier thought demonstrated the flatness of the world. Note that this does not suggest that the world really was flat for them--in fact the real world was always round. But to postmodernists, paradigms are reality. We cannot speak of a "real" world out there.

- Dr. Campbell names several features used in scientific research intended to reduce bias and enhance objectivity. He included replication, blind testing, peer review and falsifiability. Do you think these aspects of research promise that scientific research will be relatively objective? How might each fail to do what it was intended to do?

- Replication could fail because the other research team produce the same results, but accept the interpretation on those results suggested by the first researcher. Later, it may be proven that while the results were valid the interpretation was wrong.
- Blind testing could demonstrate a true correlation between one thing and another, but still fail to reveal the true cause and effect relationship between them. Just because we show that two things are statistically correlated, does not mean we have demonstrated what is the cause and what is the effect. Blind testing eliminates researcher bias, but cannot fix an improperly structured experiment.
- Peer review can fail because other scientists may be locked into a paradigm that causes them to exclude contradictory information. For instance, stomach ulcers have only recently been shown to be the result of bacterial infection. For decades scientists have missed this fact in unison.
- Some correct findings cannot be falsified, and some false conclusions cannot be demonstrated as false either. Particularly in more theoretical fields of study, conclusions are arrived at inductively, and are only accepted as the most probable conclusion.
- Dr. Campbell says, “This is a contradiction within modernism: Their conclusions are supposed to be based on reason and observation, not on faith. Yet, confidence in things like observation require faith. They end up using faith, even as they argue against faith.” Could you articulate this point to a sharp, learned modernist? Write a list of questions that would lead a modernist thinker to see this contradiction.

To the modernist:

1. How do you know the data of your senses corresponds to the "real" world?
2. How do you know cause and effect and natural laws operate the same way in all parts of the universe?
3. If cause and effect in a closed system accounts for everything, what caused the big bang? If you don't know, isn't your belief that cause and effect accounts for everything based on blind faith?

Think of some more if you can.

- Dr. Campbell quotes Renee Weber when she says, “Science as it is used in this book stands for the attitude of Einstein rather than of Bacon: an attitude of kinship with nature rather than of exploitive power over her.” Can you think of any movies or books that have portrayed science as primarily an exploiter and destroyer of nature?

- Go to a video or book store and browse the most popular rentals or books for examples here.
- In this chapter, Dr. Feyerabend suggests that science has no more legitimacy or authority than other approaches to reality, like magic. How would you respond to such a claim?
 - Magic explains disease as a symptom of spirit possession or cursing. Medical science can heal many of the same diseases magic is helpless to heal. Life expectancy has more than doubled in areas where magic healing has been replaced by medical science.
 - The same people who claim science has never done anything better than magic fly planes, drive cars, and write their anti-scientific books on computers while listening to their radios!

Think of more examples if you can.

Chapter 12

The Postmodern Method: Religion

Discussion Guide

Since this subject is of special interest to Christian groups, we suggest using at least two weeks on this chapter.

Religion Week 1

The Cardinal Sin of Intolerance

- Read the Dear Abby letter on page 199-200 and her reply.
- Do you agree with McCallum and Leffel's observation that the definition of intolerance has changed in recent years?
- Do you feel free to object to another's religious view today, or to suggest their beliefs are untrue? Why or why not?
- What would happen at your job today if you openly express your religious convictions that another employee's behavior or views are wrong?
- Are postmodern-influenced people you know more tolerant? Are they tolerant of racism? Are they tolerant of Christianity? Are they tolerant of traditional western values? What are the rules of tolerance today?
- How do you feel about the relationship between knowing and declaring truth and falsehood on one hand, and being arrogant on the other?
- Everyone agrees that we may project arrogance when disagreeing with another. How can we avoid unnecessarily offending people in the postmodern world? Name at least three ways to project humility and understanding:
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
- What would you say if someone at work or in the neighborhood asked you if you are a Christian fundamentalist? How would you explain your answer?

Facilitator's Guide to Religion Week 1

The Cardinal Sin of Intolerance

- Read the Dear Abby letter on page 199-200 and her reply.
- Do you agree with McCallum and Leffel's observation that the definition of intolerance has changed in recent years?
 - Possible response: They claim the definition has changed from the old: "In earlier years, intolerance meant bigotry or prejudice--that is, judging someone or excluding them socially because of who they are, or because of a superficial understanding of what they believe. It also usually implied the desire to use force. . ." But of the new definition they say, "in postmodern usage, intolerance has come to mean that simply disagreeing about beliefs"
- Do you feel free to object to another's religious view today, or to suggest their beliefs are untrue? Why or why not?
- What would happen at your job today if you openly express your religious convictions that another employee's behavior or views are wrong?
- Are postmodern-influenced people you know more tolerant? Are they tolerant of racism? Are they tolerant of Christianity? Are they tolerant of traditional western values? What are the rules of tolerance today?
 - Isn't it true that tolerance is quite selective for postmodern culture? We will see examples of highly restrictive speech codes propounded by postmodern educators in recent years. Are such speech codes suggestive of tolerance?]
- How do you feel about the relationship between knowing and declaring truth and falsehood on one hand, and being arrogant on the other?
 - In formulating your answer to this question, be sure to consider Jesus, who knew a lot, who condemned falsehood, but who was extremely humble. What other biblical heroes of faith denounced falsehood even though being humble.
- Everyone agrees that we may project arrogance when disagreeing with another. How can we avoid unnecessarily offending people in the postmodern world? Name at least three ways to project humility and understanding:
 - 1.
 - 2.

3.

- What would you say if someone at work or in the neighborhood asked you if you are a Christian fundamentalist? How would you explain your answer?

Religion Week 2

The Cardinal Sin of Objectivity

Discussion Guide

- The authors claim, “Both evangelicals and modernists have historically believed in the use of reason, beginning with the law of non-contradiction: A is not non-A.” Do you agree with this claim? Can you think of any exceptions?
- For those who believe there are exceptions to the law of non-contradiction, if rationality fails in one area, how do we know it is valid in any area?
- The authors say, “Religion based only on personal experience and ‘what’s true for me’ is perfectly compatible with the postmodern world view.” Isn’t experience important in Christianity? How would you distinguish between Christianity and other experience-based religions?
- The postmodern religionists says, “My experience is the basis for my beliefs, and those beliefs exist to empower me.” Formulate a similar statement from the perspective of a biblical Christian:

_____ is the basis for my beliefs, and those beliefs exist

- The authors claim that the church has lost the loyalty of a huge number of people during our lifetime. Is this true? If so, what do you think are the reasons for such a shift? Who is to blame?
- What do you think of the assertion that some secular recovery groups are postmodern? Should Christians participate in recovery groups? Should the church start groups based on the twelve steps? If so, should the steps be adapted to Christian doctrine in any way, or left as they are?
- Are you aware of any movements or fads within evangelical Christianity that might tend to move self or experience to the center in terms of authority?
- Discuss the proposition at the end of the chapter: “In a world where everyone’s position is true, nobody’s position matters.” Have you ever felt the reality of this statement? Think of conversations with relativist thinkers.

Facilitator's Guide, Religion Week 2

The Cardinal Sin of Objectivity

- The authors claim, “Both evangelicals and modernists have historically believed in the use of reason, beginning with the law of non-contradiction: A is not non-A.” Do you agree with this claim? Can you think of any exceptions?
- For those who believe there are exceptions to the law of non-contradiction, if rationality fails in one area, how do we know it is valid in any area?
 - Anyone who claims reason doesn't apply to some area of inconsistency in his own argument but does apply everywhere else is guilty of the logical fallacy called "special pleading." When we special plead, we demand special rules for our own argument but we are not willing to let the opposition have the same or similar special rules in their argument. In other words, once we say there are exceptions to laws like non-contradiction in one case, we must allow that other exceptions may exist in other areas. Reason suddenly has no authority in defining reality.
 - Remember, saying something is beyond our comprehension is different than saying it is beyond the realm of the rational. See the example of a Xerox copier--we may not understand how it works (it is beyond our comprehension) but that doesn't mean it is irrational. That which is beyond my comprehension is not necessarily beyond someone else's comprehension. God, after all, comprehends everything
 - Realize that some theological formulations have historically been phrased as contradictory by theologians who placed no confidence in reason. Before accepting such formulations, make certain they are biblical and not merely traditional.
- The authors say, “Religion based only on personal experience and ‘what's true for me’ is perfectly compatible with the postmodern world view.” Isn't experience important in Christianity? How would you distinguish between Christianity and other experience-based religions?
 - Experience is important in Christianity. Christianity is a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and a relationship, to be personal, must be an experience. However, experience isn't what makes Christianity true. God's truth is true regardless of what I experience. Experience might help to **verify** the truth to me as one line of evidence. It does not **make** something true for me.
 - Experience **plus** rational evidence is completely different than experience **instead of** rational evidence. Experience also must be judged by truth,

not vice versa. This means experience must ultimately be judged by reason when biblical revelation bears on my experience.

- For instance, I may feel that a Bible teacher blessed me so much during a teaching, that he must be of God. Later, I discover that the text he relied on actually means something else in context. At that point, I should judge my experience as mistaken, no matter how pleasurable.

- The postmodern religionists says, “My experience is the basis for my beliefs, and those beliefs exist to empower me.” Formulate a similar statement from the perspective of a biblical Christian:

Possible answers: [*God's word or ultimate reality*] is the basis for my beliefs, and those beliefs exist [*because they are true*]

- The authors claim that the church has lost the loyalty of a huge number of people during our lifetime. Is this true? If so, what do you think are the reasons for such a shift? Who is to blame?
 - Current polls continue to show rapid decline in overall church attendance during each of the past several years. Since the 60's church attendance has fallen nearly 50%. Evangelical church attendance has not fallen significantly. However, even though millions have apparently transferred from liberal denominations to evangelical churches, evangelical attendance has failed to rise
 - We suggest resisting answers that center on powerful minorities of sinners who brought their evil agenda in and took over the country. We should not look away from the fact that if the church was doing its job, anti-Christian forces never would have gained the ground they have.
- What do you think of the assertion that some secular recovery groups are postmodern? Should Christians participate in recovery groups? Should the church start groups based on the twelve steps? If so, should the steps be adapted to Christian doctrine in any way, or left as they are?

We believe the secular recovery movement should not be brought into the ministry of the church without a careful reconsideration and modification of several key points in their agenda.

- Are you aware of any movements or fads within evangelical Christianity that might tend to move self or experience to the center in terms of authority?
- Discuss the proposition at the end of the chapter: “In a world where everyone’s position is true, nobody’s position matters.” Have you ever felt the reality of this statement? Think of conversations with relativist thinkers.

Chapter 13 The Postmodern Religious Shift: 5 Case Studies

Discussion Guide

Elaine Pagels

Pagels provides an excellent example of how postmodernists approach the Bible. She uses many of the literary tools and concepts we studied in chapter 7 to radically reshape the Christian message.

- How does the following passage illustrate the postmodern interest in subverting the author's authority?
 - “When we examine its practical effect on the Christian movement, we can see, paradoxically, that the doctrine of the bodily resurrection also serves an essential political function: it legitimizes the authority of certain men who claim to exercise exclusive leadership over the churches.”
- How does the following quote from *The Gnostic Gospels* provide an example of the postmodern spirituality that's so popular today?
 - “The resurrection, they (Gnostics) insisted, was not a unique event in the past: instead, it symbolized how Christ's presence could be experienced in the present. What mattered was not literal seeing, but spiritual vision.”
- What postmodern concepts are contained in this statement?
- Can you see why this kind of radical reconstruction of Christianity is so popular?
 - Discussion leader: It's popular because it leaves the individual as the source of truth. No authority outside of the self is ever needed.

Joseph Campbell

Campbell teaches that the underlying structure of the unconscious mind is based on “archetypes.” These archetypes represent our connection with our evolutionary past, and our connection to nature. Religious myth is how we get in touch with this unconscious reality. Ultimate truths about reality end up being truths about ourselves.

- How does the following quote from *The Power of Myth* explain the relationship of myth to our true, unconscious self?
 - “All of these wonderful poetic images of mythology are referring to something in you. When your mind is simply trapped by the image out there so that you never make the reference to yourself, you have misread the image . . . Now you can personify God in many, many ways. Is there one god? Are there many gods? Those are merely categories of thought.”

- For Campbell, myth is metaphor. There can be no objective or rational grasp of ultimate truths. That's what he means when he says,
 "The person who thinks he has found the ultimate truth is wrong.
 There is an often-quoted verse in Sanskrit, which appears in the Chinese *Tao-te Ching* [Taoist Scripture] as well: 'He who thinks he knows, doesn't know. He who knows that he doesn't know, knows. For in this context, to know is not to know. And not to know is to know.'"
- What's wrong with this statement?

Discussion leader:

- This statement is a self contradiction. How does he know that "he who knows doesn't know?" He's claiming a kind of knowledge that he says we can't have.
- Campbell insists that the biblical authors were aware of the mythological nature of their writings. They wrote, Campbell insists, "as if" their stories were literally true. What passages of scripture directly reject his view?

Discussion leader. Several passages are relevant. Perhaps none more than this:

"We did not follow cleverly invented stories [GK *muthos* = myths] when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty." (2 Peter 1:16)

- see also I Corinthians 15:1-19. Go through the passage and identify the statements that lay stress on the importance of the actual historicity of Christ's death. Does this passage allow in any way for a metaphorical or mythical understanding of the resurrection?

Feminist Spirituality

The authors make a distinction between the legitimate concerns of women in a rapidly changing culture and the ideological position taken by feminists.

- Can you see how the legitimate concerns of women (or any other definable social group) is different from a militant ideological point of view? How is feminism different from the concerns of women?
- Clearly, feminism is a type of affirmative postmodernism. The ideological approach to truth is clear in all of feminist literature, especially among feminist theologians. They start from the perspective of what they conceive to be "women's experience." Read the following quotes from the chapter:

"By women's experience as a key to hermeneutics or theory of interpretation, we mean precisely that experience which arises when

women become critically aware of these falsifying and alienating experiences imposed upon them as women by a male-dominated culture.”

“All women live with male violence . . .”

- Do you think that this is an appropriate place to begin forming an approach to reading the Bible? Why, or Why not?
- Read the following quote carefully. What implications do you find in the statement?
 “Whatever contradicts those convictions [arising from women's experience] cannot be accepted as having the authority of an authentic revelation of truth. It is simply a matter of there being no turning back. We can be dispossessed of our best insights, proven wrong in our judgments. But as long as those insights continue to make sense to us, and as long as our basic judgments seem to us incontrovertible, there can be no turning back. So it is with feminist consciousness and the interpretation of scripture.”
- What do you think of the feminist discussion of Genesis 2:22-24 (the creation of Eve out of Adam)? Does it justify male violence against women, as feminist theologians argue?

John Bradshaw

- Bradshaw is the high priest of the inner child movement in popular psychology. Do any members of the group feel they have benefited from this school?
- What do you think of Bradshaw’s loathing for so-called “patriarchy?” Do you see evidence that people lose their ability to direct themselves because they were raised under patriarchy?
- If my inner child is the true me, and I am “championing my inner child,” is this the same, or different than championing me?
- What do you think of entering the mindless state Bradshaw calls “the silence?” Have you ever done this in connection with religion, or have you seen others do so?
- The Bible teaches that meditation is good in passages like Psalms 1. What difference, if any, do you see between biblical meditation and the sort of meditation Bradshaw advances?

Frederick Turner

- Read the section on Turner first.
- The authors claim, “Like some even in the evangelical camp today, Turner discounts the importance of truth and theology in favor of ritualistic experience.” Have you

seen this? Do you think the contemporary churches are more, or less ritualistic than the New Testament church?

- What do you think of Turner's suggestion that ritual does not need to be linked to any particular truth? Are you aware of any similarity in the ritual of different religions?
- Could you see people from different religions coming together based on ritual?

Facilitator's Guide, 5 Case Studies

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- For Campbell, myth is metaphor. There can be no objective or rational grasp of ultimate truths. That's what he means when he says,

“The person who thinks he has found the ultimate truth is wrong. There is an often-quoted verse in Sanskrit, which appears in the Chinese *Tao-te Ching* [Taoist Scripture] as well: ‘He who thinks he knows, doesn't know. He who knows that he doesn't know, knows. For in this context, to know is not to know. And not to know is to know.’”

- What’s wrong with this statement?

Discussion leader:

- This statement is a self contradiction. How does he know that “he who knows doesn’t know?” He’s claiming a kind of knowledge that he says we can’t have.

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Discussion leader. Several passages are relevant. Perhaps none more than this:

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- see also I Corinthians 15:1-19. Go through the passage and identify the statements that lay stress on the importance of the actual historicity of Christ's death. Does this passage allow in any way for a metaphorical or mythical understanding of the resurrection?

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Leffel makes a distinction between the legitimate concerns of women in a rapidly changing culture and the ideological position taken by feminists.

- Can you see how the legitimate concerns of women (or any other definable social group) is different from a militant ideological point of view? How is feminism different from the concerns of women?
- Clearly, feminism is a type of affirmative postmodernism. The ideological approach to truth is clear in all of feminist literature, especially among feminist theologians. They start from the perspective of what they conceive to be “women’s experience.” Read the following quotes from the chapter:

“By women's experience as a key to hermeneutics or theory of interpretation, we mean precisely that experience which arises when women become critically aware of these falsifying and alienating experiences imposed upon them as women by a male-dominated culture.”

"All women live with male violence . . ."

- Do you think that this is an appropriate place to begin forming an approach to reading the Bible? Why, or Why not?
- Read the following quote carefully. What implications do you find in the statement?
 "Whatever contradicts those convictions [arising from women's experience] cannot be accepted as having the authority of an authentic revelation of truth. It is simply a matter of there being no turning back. We can be dispossessed of our best insights, proven wrong in our judgments. But as long as those insights continue to make sense to us, and as long as our basic judgments seem to us incontrovertible, there can be no turning back. So it is with feminist consciousness and the interpretation of scripture."
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- What do you think of entering the mindless state Bradshaw calls "the silence?" Have you ever done this in connection with religion, or have you seen others do so?
- The Bible teaches that meditation is good in passages like Psalms 1. What difference, if any, do you see between biblical meditation and the sort of meditation Bradshaw advances?

- Biblical meditation is not contentless meditation, where we seek to empty our minds, but contentful meditation on the Word of God, as indicated in Psalms 1.

Frederick Turner

- Read the section on Turner first.

- McCallum claims, “Like some even in the evangelical camp today, Turner discounts the importance of truth and theology in favor of ritualistic experience.” Have you seen this? Do you think contemporary churches are more, or less ritualistic than the New Testament church?
- What do you think of Turner’s suggestion that ritual does not need to be linked to any particular truth? Are you aware of any similarity in the ritual of different religions?
 - Rituals differ in details, but are remarkably uniform in type among religions the world over. Key areas of ritual are:
 - Fertility-- rituals intended to encourage deities to grant fertility to fields and human women through sympathetic magic
 - Penance rituals that focus on self-punishment, self-sacrifice, or animal sacrifice
 - Possession phenomena-- rituals leading to spirit possession, either for worshipers or for their shamanistic leader. Possession often is sought in order to communicate with the spirit world for the sake of divining the future, or determining when to do key things.
 - Healing-- Shamanistic rituals intended to drive away evil spirits that cause illness
 - Rites of passage-- rituals which formalize and commemorate key transitions in life such as from childhood to adulthood.
 - Community belonging-- rituals that signify membership in the community
 - Why are rituals so similar, and why do some Christian churches have rituals that could be viewed as similar to those in other religions. Consider different possibilities such as:
 - the similarities are superficial and partial (sacrifice)
 - the churches practicing similar rituals have borrowed them from other religions rather than from the Bible
 - man-made religion reflects features in human nature that are universal only because the humans are at the center of each religious system. This would argue that revealed authentic spirituality should be different from other religions.
 - Satan may counterfeit true religion with ritual practice that is similar to that in Christianity but with key differences that keep people in his power.
- Could you see people from different religions coming together based on ritual?

Chapter 14

Evangelical Imperatives

Discussion Guide

- Again, this section is important for Christians, so we have more than one week planned.

Week 1: Accommodation Temptation

- In the first two sections of this chapter, McCallum claims Christians today are being tempted to down-play the absolute nature of truth because it is unpopular. Have you seen any evidence of this?
- Go over each of the following examples cited by McCallum, and say whether you have seen evidence of postmodern tendencies among evangelical Christians in that area. What are the similarities and what are the differences? What does the Bible teach on each?

- ◆ Excessive reliance or hope placed in evangelical political power

- Yes, • No

Similarity:

Difference:

Biblical teaching:

- ◆ Evangelicals, especially youth, believing that truth is relative

- Yes, • No

Similarity:

Difference:

Biblical teaching:

- ◆ Experience-centeredness. Placing experience as the final goal or authority instead of truth

- Yes, • No

Similarity:

Difference:

Biblical teaching:

- ◆ Negative portrayals of “head-knowledge” in favor of “heart-knowledge”

- Yes, • No

Similarity:

Difference:

Biblical teaching:

- ◆ Word-faith doctrines that stress believers faith bringing about any outcome they desire

- Yes, • No

Similarity:

Difference:

Biblical teaching:

- ◆ Postmodern victimology. People believing victims’ stories must always be believed without question

- Yes, • No

Similarity:

Difference:

Biblical teaching:

- ◆ Claims that interpretation of Scripture always depends on tradition

- Yes, • No

Similarity:

Difference:

Biblical teaching:

- ◆ New demands for “respect” for others rather than love of others

- Yes, • No

Similarity:

Difference:

Biblical teaching:

Week 2: Assessing Postmodernism

- McCallum covers several positive insights advanced by postmodern thinkers. Look at the list below and discuss whether you see any practical use for each insight.
 - ◆ Without the infinite-personal creator God of the Bible, knowledge and reason do indeed become uncertain
 - ◆ People are more subjective than they like to admit

- ◆ Our culture can, and often does, blind our eyes to truth that is obvious to other cultures, and which, in retrospect may also be clear to us
 - ◆ People are social beings, and our social or cultural setting shapes and informs our values and thinking
 - ◆ Blind faith in our legal status quo is unwarranted.
- In his critique of postmodernism, McCallum makes the following charges. Discuss each--which do you feel are appropriate, and which are more, or less important? Which ones speak to you? Which ones might be useful in trying to persuade postmodern thinkers? Finally, can you articulate the Christian rebuttal for each point? (If you can't remember, look in the book)
 - ◆ Their attempt to deny the validity of reason is itself *based on reason*.
 - Appropriate
 - Important
 - Speaks to me
 - Useful for persuasion
 Christian rebuttal:
 - ◆ They exaggerate when they claim people are prisoners of their cultures and their languages.
 - Appropriate
 - Important
 - Speaks to me
 - Useful for persuasion
 Christian rebuttal:
 - ◆ They exaggerate the difficulties involved in scientific objectivity and neutrality.
 - Appropriate
 - Important
 - Speaks to me
 - Useful for persuasion
 Christian rebuttal:

- ◆ They exaggerate the difficulties in translation and interpretation of texts.
 - Appropriate
 - Important
 - Speaks to me
 - Useful for persuasionChristian rebuttal:

- ◆ They try to deny the self, but this is always self-contradictory.
 - Appropriate
 - Important
 - Speaks to me
 - Useful for persuasionChristian rebuttal:

- ◆ Postmodernists exaggerate the differences in how people understand words until all language is a prison house preventing us from understanding other people's "realities."
 - Appropriate
 - Important
 - Speaks to me
 - Useful for persuasionChristian rebuttal:

- ◆ While supposedly giving us a new way of coming together in the world (based on relativism and “respect”) postmodernists actually foster division.
 - Appropriate
 - Important
 - Speaks to me
 - Useful for persuasionChristian rebuttal:

- ◆ They falsely claim that Hitler, Stalin and Mao were violent because they believed in absolutes or metanarratives.
 - Appropriate
 - Important
 - Speaks to me
 - Useful for persuasionChristian rebuttal:

- ◆ Postmodern substitution of power for truth contains a threat of future oppression, especially for minorities.
 - Appropriate
 - Important
 - Speaks to me
 - Useful for persuasionChristian rebuttal:

- ◆ Minorities' only hope for fair treatment is that society becomes convinced that there is such a thing as right and wrong in the objective sense.
 - Appropriate
 - Important
 - Speaks to me
 - Useful for persuasionChristian rebuttal:

- ◆ Postmodern race and feminist theorists explain that racism is the result of modernistic belief systems rather than selfishness born of innate sin.

- Appropriate
- Important
- Speaks to me
- Useful for persuasion

Christian rebuttal:

- ◆ They also project racism and sexism only as problems for whites and men.
 - Appropriate
 - Important
 - Speaks to me
 - Useful for persuasion

Christian rebuttal:

- ◆ Postmodernists claim that people who think they know better than someone else are arrogant, but the truly arrogant are those who create their own unquestionable truth.
 - Appropriate
 - Important
 - Speaks to me
 - Useful for persuasion

Christian rebuttal:

Week 3 Evangelical Imperatives

Postmodern vs. Christian Views on Truth and Reason

- McCallum says, “When we let feelings and experience follow after truth, they take their God-given place in our walks--blessings from God for which we should be grateful.” What does “follow after” mean in this context? What would it mean to have experience “go before?”
- McCallum says, “When we deny reason, we automatically deny truth.” Is this necessarily so?

- Have you ever heard an evangelical Christian question whether reason applies to the things of God?
- What do you think of one who holds that reason applies part of the time, but not all the time?
- Have you ever felt personally embarrassed by the absolute truth claims of Christianity? If so, what should you do?
- Do you think the church today is too “left-brained?” Or do you agree with McCallum that most Christian people are insufficiently sophisticated in their theological thinking?
- McCallum thinks, “Reason is *reliable*, but not *sufficient*. As biblical Christians, we believe reason can tell us much about the world, but not everything. We also need revelation.” Can we hold to knowledge that goes beyond reason without denying the validity of reason?

Postmodern vs. Christian Views on Culture

- Missions experts are concerned today about “contextualization”--adapting Christianity to other cultures, and avoiding exporting western cultural features to other non-western cultures. How would you differentiate between postmodern views on culturally constructed reality and appropriate biblical contextualization?
- McCallum says, “Christians have no debate with the observation that people usually adopt their culture’s point of view. Our problem is with the postmodern position that they have no choice in this, because they are imprisoned in the reality constructed by their language and culture. We must reject cultural determinism.” Do you agree with this? Why, or why not? What difference would it make if we adopted one or the other view on this question? Can you think of any biblical material on Christ and other cultures?
- “The truth stands *over* culture, as its judge, not *under* culture as its product.” Give some examples of how this statement might work in real life.

Postmodern vs. Christian Views on Language

- In any literary text, interpretation is unavoidable. How, then, can Christians claim texts have objective, fixed messages we must discover?
- Under reader-centered postmodern hermeneutics, readers are free to generate new meaning in biblical texts. Therefore, McCallum claims, “they are in the position formerly occupied by God--that of revealer and source of truth.” Is this statement too hard?

- Discuss the difference between *interpretation* and *application* of Scripture. How does this distinction relate to the idea of reader-response hermeneutics?
- McCallum says, “Postmodernists aren't wrong in everything they say, but their fundamental thrust is completely wrong and incompatible with biblical Christianity.” Is this statement too strong? Why or why not?

Facilitator's Guide for Evangelical Imperatives

- Again, this section is important for Christians, so we have more than one week planned.

Week 1: Accommodation Temptation

- In the first two sections of this chapter, McCallum claims Christians today are being tempted to down-play the absolute nature of truth because it is unpopular. Have you seen any evidence of this?

For those who are readers, check out *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World*, Philips and Okholm, Ed. (IVP 1996) and see which of the contributors from this evangelical conference at Wheaton College were influenced by postmodern ideas.

- Go over each of the following examples cited by McCallum, and say whether you have seen evidence of postmodern tendencies among evangelical Christians in that area. What are the similarities and what are the differences? What does the Bible teach on each?

- ◆ Excessive reliance or hope placed in evangelical political power

- Yes, • No

Similarity:

Difference:

Biblical teaching:

- ◆ Evangelicals, especially youth, believing that truth is relative

- Yes, • No

Similarity:

Difference:

Biblical teaching:

- ◆ Experience-centeredness. Placing experience as the final goal or authority instead of truth

- Yes, • No

Similarity:

Difference:

Biblical teaching:

- ◆ Negative portrayals of “head-knowledge” in favor of “heart-knowledge”

- Yes, • No

Similarity:

Difference:

Biblical teaching:

- ◆ Word-faith doctrines that stress believers faith bringing about any outcome they desire

- Yes, • No

Similarity:

Difference:

Biblical teaching:

- ◆ Postmodern victimology. People believing victims' stories must always be believed without question

- Yes, • No

Similarity:

Difference:

Biblical teaching:

- ◆ Claims that interpretation of Scripture always depends on tradition

- Yes, • No

Similarity:

Difference:

Biblical teaching:

- ◆ New demands for “respect” for others rather than love of others

- Yes, • No

Similarity:

Difference:

Biblical teaching:

Week 2: Assessing Postmodernism

- McCallum covers several positive insights advanced by postmodern thinkers. Look at the list below and discuss whether you see any practical use for each insight.
 - ◆ Without the infinite-personal creator God of the Bible, knowledge and reason do indeed become uncertain
 - ◆ People are more subjective than they like to admit
 - ◆ Our culture can, and often does, blind our eyes to truth that is obvious to other cultures, and which, in retrospect may also be clear to us
 - ◆ People are social beings, and our social or cultural setting shapes and informs our values and thinking
 - ◆ Blind faith in our legal status quo is unwarranted.
- In his critique of postmodernism, McCallum makes the following charges. Discuss each--which do you feel are appropriate, and which are more, or less important? Which ones speak to you? Which ones might be useful in trying to persuade postmodern thinkers? Finally, can you articulate the Christian rebuttal for each point? (If you can't remember, look in the book)
 - ◆ Their attempt to deny the validity of reason is itself *based on reason*.

- Appropriate
- Important
- Speaks to me
- Useful for persuasion

Christian rebuttal:

- ◆ They exaggerate when they claim people are prisoners of their cultures and their languages.

- Appropriate
- Important
- Speaks to me
- Useful for persuasion

Christian rebuttal:

- ◆ They exaggerate the difficulties involved in scientific objectivity and neutrality.

- Appropriate
- Important
- Speaks to me
- Useful for persuasion

Christian rebuttal:

- ◆ They exaggerate the difficulties in translation and interpretation of texts.

- Appropriate
- Important
- Speaks to me
- Useful for persuasion

Christian rebuttal:

- ◆ They try to deny the self, but this is always self-contradictory.

- Appropriate
- Important
- Speaks to me
- Useful for persuasion

Christian rebuttal:

- ◆ Postmodernists exaggerate the differences in how people understand words until all language is a prison house preventing us from understanding other people's "realities.

- Appropriate
- Important
- Speaks to me
- Useful for persuasion

Christian rebuttal:

- ◆ While supposedly giving us a new way of coming together in the world (based on relativism and “respect”) postmodernists actually foster division.

- Appropriate
- Important
- Speaks to me
- Useful for persuasion

Christian rebuttal:

- ◆ They falsely claim that Hitler, Stalin and Mao were violent because they believed in absolutes or metanarratives.

- Appropriate
- Important
- Speaks to me
- Useful for persuasion

Christian rebuttal:

- ◆ Postmodern substitution of power for truth contains a threat of future oppression, especially for minorities.

- Appropriate
- Important
- Speaks to me
- Useful for persuasion

Christian rebuttal:

- ◆ Minorities' only hope for fair treatment is that society becomes convinced that there is such a thing as right and wrong in the objective sense.

- Appropriate
- Important
- Speaks to me
- Useful for persuasion

Christian rebuttal:

- ◆ Postmodern race and feminist theorists explain that racism is the result of modernistic belief systems rather than selfishness born of innate sin.

- Appropriate
- Important
- Speaks to me
- Useful for persuasion

Christian rebuttal:

- ◆ They also project racism and sexism only as problems for whites and men.
 - Appropriate
 - Important
 - Speaks to me
 - Useful for persuasion

Christian rebuttal:

- ◆ Postmodernists claim that people who think they know better than someone else are arrogant, but the truly arrogant are those who create their own unquestionable truth.
 - Appropriate
 - Important
 - Speaks to me
 - Useful for persuasion

Christian rebuttal:

Week 3 Evangelical Imperatives

Postmodern vs. Christian Views on Truth and Reason

- McCallum says, “When we let feelings and experience follow after truth, they take their God-given place in our walks--blessings from God for which we should be grateful.” What does “follow after” mean in this context? What would it mean to have experience “go before?”

- This is primarily a matter of emphasis and interpretation. Emphasis means, what occupies our minds? What do we talk about most? What do we extol in our teachings?
- Interpretation means, what does it mean when I have not had much spiritual experience lately? If lack of experience means I am away from the Lord, then experience has become my definition of what true spirituality is all about. This is especially true when experience has been lacking for a relatively short time.
- Put differently, when experience is the goal of my walk with God, I am no longer in line with biblical priorities.
- McCallum says, “When we deny reason, we automatically deny truth.” Is this necessarily so?
 - It is, if by "truth" we mean objective truth--truth that does not depend on my believing it to be true. Note that the notion of objective truth is linked to the "correspondence theory of truth." That is, my thought is true when it corresponds to external reality. Note also that this is the Bible's own definition of truth.
- Have you ever heard an evangelical Christian question whether reason applies to the things of God?
- What do you think of one who holds that reason applies part of the time, but not all the time?

Anyone who claims that reason does not apply to some part of his own position is guilty of the logical fallacy called "special pleading." He is pleading for a rule to apply to his argument that he will not allow for other arguments. In other words, if we think reason doesn't apply to some areas, we are forced to admit it may not apply to any area. If so, we can no longer use reason to refute any argument.
- Have you ever felt personally embarrassed by the absolute truth claims of Christianity? If so, what should you do?
 - Discuss ways to soften the blow without compromising the truth. This is called "tact" in communication, and many Christians could use more of it.
- Do you think the church today is too “left-brained?” Or do you agree with McCallum that most Christian people are insufficiently sophisticated in their theological thinking?

- McCallum thinks, “Reason is *reliable*, but not *sufficient*. As biblical Christians, we believe reason can tell us much about the world, but not everything. We also need revelation.” Can we hold to knowledge that goes beyond reason without denying the validity of reason?
 - Yes, we can. Do you know how the copier in your office works? Perhaps not. Do you know what the future holds? Definitely not. Yet neither of these are incompatible with reason, or irrational. So, too, God may be beyond our comprehension, but this does not mean he is irrational.

Postmodern vs. Christian Views on Culture

- Missions experts are concerned today about “contextualization”--adapting Christianity to other cultures, and avoiding exporting western cultural features to other non-western cultures. How would you differentiate between postmodern views on culturally constructed reality and appropriate biblical contextualization?
 - Contextualization means we dress and speak in ways compatible with another culture *in order* to bring them the universal truth of the Gospel. Postmodernists deny there are universal truths.
- McCallum says, “Christians have no debate with the observation that people usually adopt their culture’s point of view. Our problem is with the postmodern position that they *have no choice in this*, because they are imprisoned in the reality constructed by their language and culture. We must reject cultural determinism.” Do you agree with this? Why, or why not? What difference would it make if we adopted one or the other view on this question? Can you think of any biblical material on Christ and other cultures?
 - The idea that people are conditioned by their culture flies directly in the face of the notion of universal judgment. It also renders Christian missions pointless. Consider how Paul, Abraham, Jesus and others defied their cultures to set forward new understandings based on revelation.
- “The truth stands *over* culture, as its judge, not *under* culture as its product.” Give some examples of how this statement might work in real life.
 - This is a very important truth. How would we know that slavery was wrong? Not by our slave owning culture, but by the principles in God's word (ICorinthians 7:23 etc.)

Postmodern vs. Christian Views on Language

- In any literary text, interpretation is unavoidable. How, then, can Christians claim texts have objective, fixed messages we must discover?

- Under reader-centered postmodern hermeneutics, readers are free to generate new meaning in biblical texts. Therefore, McCallum claims, “they are in the position formerly occupied by God--that of revealer and source of truth.” Is this statement too hard?
- Discuss the difference between *interpretation* and *application* of Scripture. How does this distinction relate to the idea of reader-response hermeneutics?
 - Interpretation is a matter of what the author intended to communicate.
Application is a matter of how God wants to apply the word to my life.
The former is objective. The latter is subjective.
- McCallum says, “Postmodernists aren't wrong in everything they say, but their fundamental thrust is completely wrong and incompatible with biblical Christianity.” Is this statement too strong? Why or why not?

Chapter 15

Practical Communication Ideas

Discussion Guide for Communication

- McCallum says, “The communication dilemma here isn't hopeless, it's just more demanding than anything western Christians have needed to deal with in our lifetimes.” In the circle of people where you get a chance to share, do you feel communicating the gospel is becoming
 - More difficult
 - About the same as ever
 - Easier
- Why do you think this is so? Compare your answers with the others in your group.
- McCallum claims, “Missions experts are well aware of the need for careful research, patient development of relationships within the community, and fluency in local language, including the ability to deliver the gospel in the local vernacular. This means, if we are to be successful at witnessing to postmodern people, including our own kids and their friends, we will have to learn the postmodern outlook.” If this claim is true, how would you rate your fluency in postmodern language and thought?
 - Not too good--people who think this way seem weird to me
 - Barely adequate--I feel stretched, and have some trouble recognizing some of the terms and ideas people refer to these days
 - Comfortable--I feel like I understand today's perspective as well or better than my non Christian friends do.
- He also claims we have some good causes for optimism. Are people in your group optimistic about Christian witness today? Compare your rating with others, and discuss what you may need to do to upgrade the morale of the group.
 - Not really. People are depressed about how hard it is to reach others in our social circles and we rarely actually share the gospel.
 - Only a little. We are hopeful, but I'm not sure how many of us are experiencing any concrete success.
 - Pretty much. We may not be experiencing the kind of success we have in earlier times, but we are being heard.
 - Very much. We are excited about the openness we are experiencing and the many hungry hearts we see responding to Christ.
- McCallum suggests one model for engaging people in serious conversation about their presuppositions. Do you think his approach sounds promising? Why or why not?
- Do you agree with McCallum that more time is needed today in pre-evangelism? Why would people need more time today than in earlier decades?

- McCallum says, “We believe that in a postmodern culture, friendship evangelism and the subjective evidence of a caring Christian community are going to be more important than ever.” Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? What could your group do to enhance these features?
- He also says, “Even though the subjective witness of Christian love is important, it should *supplement* the truth of the Gospel, not *replace* it.” Who do you think this comment is, or could be, aimed at? Is it appropriate?
- “Our children haven't been protected from postmodern ideology merely because they have never been exposed to it,” says McCallum. “They are only safe when they are familiar with postmodern arguments and are prepared to answer them confidently.” Do you agree with this line of thought? He thinks small children are exceptions to the need to expose kids to radical postmodern culture. At what age range do you think this transition (between protection and hands-off adulthood) should occur? How could your group do more to facilitate this transition?

This concludes our study of *The Death of Truth*. If you are interested, The Crossroads Project has materials for further study. Also you could attend or sponsor a *Postmodern Challenge* conference near your area. For a free conference schedule and additional information including how your group can bring the conference to your city, call 1 (800) 698-7884, or visit <http://www.crossrds.org> and leave feedback or questions at one of the response fields. You can also ask to be put on our quarterly mailing list containing information of developments in this area. We look forward to hearing from you!

Facilitator's Guide for Communication

- McCallum says, “The communication dilemma here isn't hopeless, it's just more demanding than anything western Christians have needed to deal with in our lifetimes.” In the circle of people where you get a chance to share, do you feel communicating the gospel is becoming
 - More difficult
 - About the same as ever
 - Easier
- Why do you think this is so? Compare your answers with the others in your group.
 - Ask if people are finding it difficult to actually engage others in conversation about what is true because they simply acknowledge everything is true.
- McCallum claims, “Missions experts are well aware of the need for careful research, patient development of relationships within the community, and fluency in local language, including the ability to deliver the gospel in the local vernacular. This means, if we are to be successful at witnessing to postmodern people, including our own kids and their friends, we will have to learn the postmodern outlook.” If this claim is true, how would you rate your fluency in postmodern language and thought?
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 - Compare answers in the group.
- He also claims we have some good causes for optimism. Are people in your group optimistic about Christian witness today? Compare your rating with others, and discuss what you may need to do to upgrade the morale of the group.
 - Not really. People are depressed about how hard it is to reach others in our social circles and we rarely actually share the gospel.
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 - Pretty much. We may not be experiencing the kind of success we have in earlier times, but we are being heard.
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- McCallum suggests one model for engaging people in serious conversation about their presuppositions. Do you think his approach sounds promising? Why or why not?

- Ask other group members, "What did you answer to this one?"
- Do you agree with McCallum that more time is needed today in pre-evangelism? Why would people need more time today than in earlier decades?
 - Accepting the gospel has been compared to moving along a continuum, rather than simply flipping a switch. The longer the continuum, or distance between where people start in their thinking and where they end, the longer it takes to travel that continuum.
- McCallum says, "We believe that in a postmodern culture, friendship evangelism and the subjective evidence of a caring Christian community are going to be more important than ever." Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? What could your group do to enhance these features?
 - Maybe plan some social events which include non Christian friends?
- He also says, "Even though the subjective witness of Christian love is important, it should *supplement* the truth of the Gospel, not *replace* it." Who do you think this comment is, or could be, aimed at? Is it appropriate?
- "Our children haven't been protected from postmodern ideology merely because they have never been exposed to it," says McCallum. "They are only safe when they are familiar with postmodern arguments and slogans and are prepared to answer them confidently." Do you agree with this line of thought?
- He thinks small children are exceptions to the need to expose kids to radical postmodern culture. At what age range do you think this transition (between protection and hands-off adulthood) should occur? How could your group do more to facilitate this transition?