

Tell me the New, New Story
How to think about Postmodernism as a Christian
January 10, 2021

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Goals

1. To make us more conversant with Postmodernism
2. To show how a Christian should think about Postmodernism
3. To give a Christian response to Postmodernism and its cultural influences
4. To lay some groundwork for you to evangelize and defend the faith
5. To demonstrate the consistency and strength of the Christian faith

Review of last time...

1. How BLM fits into Postmodernism
 - a. Narratives (not propositions) convey truth
 - b. Experiences (not propositions) convey truth
2. BLM and Marxism
3. What should Christians think?
 - a. Their stance against racism is inadequate
 - b. Their definition of racism is inadequate
 - c. Their resolution for racism is inadequate

Today...

1. Three Affirmations of Postmodernism
2. Three Denials of Postmodernism
3. Brief Overview of Postmodern Christianity

Before giving critiques...

1. First Nuclear Question to any Worldview... "Says who?"
 - a. Figure out what assumes FINAL AUTHORITY
 1. The most fundamental thing that the worldview relies upon
 2. It will have EXCLUSIVE claim to (only) this system of thought
 3. Distinguish Assertions they claim from the Authority that they rely upon
 4. Authority is the root... Assertions are the fruit...
 5. Why is _____ right/wrong?
 - b. Then, see if the particulars flow naturally from that authority
 1. "There is no absolute truth!"
 2. "Black Lives Matter!"
 3. "I just can't worship a God who..."
2. Second Nuclear Question to any Worldview... "Is it consistent?"
 - a. Does it make sense internally?
 1. Is it self-referentially consistent?
 2. Are there thought-categories that it can't sustain itself by?
 3. Examples...
 1. "Truth and logic don't exist, and here's why..."
 2. "We are all just objects floating around in space... but we matter!"
 - b. Does it make sense externally?
 1. Is it consistent with reference to the world around it?
 2. Does it contradict the physical laws of the universe?

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3. Examples...
 1. "Life came from something that is not alive."
 2. "You can create reality by your words and thoughts."

Affirmations of Postmodernism

1. Correct: Resolving the Human Condition isn't found "out there"
 - a. Remember the history of Postmodernism? (Industrial Revolution → Post WW2)
 1. Great inventions RIGHT alongside great(er) atrocities
 - b. Modernism and Rationalism NEED to be rejected!
 1. General Revelation alone is an insufficient navigator in God's world
 2. Science and Reason were never meant to be our saviors
 3. HOWEVER, we need to embrace a Pre-Modern worldview instead!
 - c. Humanity is more than just its ability to impose order
 1. People are more than just brains with utilitarian abilities
 2. There are REAL problems out there that transcend tangible causes/solutions
 3. Human ingenuity at its best cannot rid us of our own sin
2. Correct: Narratives are vitally important for conveying truth-claims
 - a. God shows this to us...
 1. About 43% of the Bible is Narrative!
 2. Genesis 1:1, Exodus 20:1, Matthew 28:19, Galatians 1:11-2:14
 3. The use of parables throughout the Bible
 - b. What a narrative does...
 1. Makes truth-claims palatable by entertaining the audience
 2. Makes the audience aware of the complexities of life experiences
 3. Makes the audience sympathetic to the experiences of the truth-claimers
 4. For instance... "Let it Go" from Frozen
3. Correct: You can certainly learn from personal experience!
 - a. Book Knowledge compared to Field Knowledge
 1. Interplay between Theory & Experience, or Knowing about & Knowing
 2. There are things that can be known by experience ("tricks of the trade")
 1. Grief, joy, pain, perseverance, contentment, attentiveness, etc.
 3. Even in Christianity: Saving Faith= Knowledge + Ascent + Trust
 - b. This forces us to consider the experiences of others!
 1. A basic application of "love your neighbor as yourself"
 2. Loving them enough to LISTEN!!
 3. Facing hard (unintentional) things about ourselves
 4. Show them that we care for the whole person...

Denials of Postmodernism

1. Wrong: Resolving the Human Condition isn't found "in here" either!
 - a. Romanticism and Irrationalism also NEED to be rejected
 1. "There is no inherent direction for the natural world"

2. They do not ultimately value Science and Reason
3. They are inherently anti-General Revelation (at the least)
- b. Creation's voice must be recognized by us...
 1. About God's glory and handiwork (Ps. 19:1)
 2. About God's invisible attributes (Rom. 1:20)
 3. Its groaning until the sons of God are revealed (Rom. 8:22)
2. Wrong: Narratives require propositions to qualify them!
 - a. All narratives are verified by overarching (non-narrative) principles
 1. The ethics (or "oughts") of a narrative dictate its quality
 2. Narratives can only mean so much until they need to be set in an ethical context
 3. Thus, to NOT have a meta-narrative is TO HAVE a meta-narrative
 - b. Another internal inconsistency of Postmodernism...
 1. Postmodernism prizes stories over truth-claims
 2. BUT you can't even explain Postmodernism without propositional truth-claims
 3. Nor could you produce any other claims while being anti-truth-claims
 4. Postmodernism can't withstand the weight of its own arguments
3. Wrong: Truth is not Personal or Experiential by nature!
 - a. (Ultimate) Truth is objective and above us
 1. Even experiences need to be constrained by Objective Truth/Reality
 2. Reality is whatever accords with the mind of God
 3. Relying upon this, we can know things about us and our world for certain
 4. Truth has been infused into Creation, and the Truth has come down to us in Christ
 - b. If truth were Personal/Experiential/Subjective by nature...
 1. No one could actually know anything at all outside themselves
 2. No one could actually be certain about anything outside themselves
 3. No one could rightly impose any ethic whatsoever upon anyone else
 4. Any argument could be debunked by saying, "That's not my narrative."

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Postmodern Christianity

1. A blanket term for Christian expression that adheres to Postmodern thought
 - a. What they value...
 1. Discovery rather than Logic
 2. Questions rather than Answers
 3. Experiencing God rather than Knowing God
 4. Stories rather than Doctrines
 - b. What they offer...
 1. An eclectic approach to worship styles
 2. Non-traditional models of hermeneutics and theology (Apophatic Theology)
 3. "Relevant" in their styles and motifs
2. What they are known for...
 - a. A Christianity without labels
 1. Highly ecumenical and story-driven
 2. Christianity "from the lens of..."
 3. Experience → Exegesis → Reflection → Application
 - b. Theology that shows, not tells
 1. Through "deeds" not "creeds"
 2. Through actions, multi-sensory art, etc.
 3. Through architecture and design
 4. Through creating space for people to encounter God
3. Examples of Postmodern Christianity...
 - a. Postmodern theological movements...
 1. Feminist Theology- Re-interpretation of the book of Ruth
 2. LGBTQ Theology- Sexual orientation was not like as it is now... homosexuality + idolatry
 - b. Postmodern authors...
 1. Rob Bell's Love Wins- "Hell is our refusal to trust God's retelling of our story."
 2. John Shelby Spong- "When I grew up in the South, I was taught that segregation was the will of God, and the Bible was quoted to prove it. I was taught that women were by nature inferior to men, and the Bible was quoted to prove it. I was taught that it was okay to hate other religions, and especially the Jews, and the Bible was quoted to prove it."
 3. Richard Rohr- "Religious people love certitudes because that's what the ego likes."
 4. Brian MacLaren's Generous Orthodoxy- See quotes on next slide

"...This book comes to celebrate orthodox doctrine-in-practice, and it comes not to bury doctrinal distinctives but rather to put them in their marginal place." (p. 32)

"For me the 'fundamentals of the faith' boil down to those given by Jesus: *to love God and to love our neighbors.*" (p. 184)

Triune love; Unselfish election; Limitless reconciliation; Inspiring grace; Passionate saints
(p. 195)

4. What they believe...

- a. The Bible is inspired by God... just like God inspires you and me today!
- b. The Bible is a wonderful work of classic literature!
- c. We are showing what "*Reformata et semper reformanda*" means!
- d. The main message of the cross is God's love and your victory over sins!
- e. Jesus' main task was to show us how to live!
- f. Humanity suffers from "*brokenness*" and "*shame!*"
- g. The four Gospels are primarily about Social Justice and how to love others!
- h. We have no idea about eschatology!
- i. Confident knowledge about God's word is "conservative dogmatism!"

What should a Christian think?

1. Postmodern Christianity is a strong weak system of Christian thought!
 - a. They are dogmatic about not being dogmatic
 1. God doesn't "mean" what he "said"
 2. Ultimately, they are their own arbiters of truth
 3. Ultimately, there can be contradictory "answers" to their questions
 4. The problem is... how do you keep all that together???
 - b. Our system of Christian thought builds you up
 1. We build upon the basic idea that God has spoken
 2. We learn what God means, then speak accordingly
 3. We can have questions about what is unclear...
 4. We don't relegate to mystery what otherwise understood as clarity
2. Postmodern Christianity will leave you in ignorance!
 - a. They are founded upon the Postmodern worldview
 1. Truth is Personal, Experiential, and found within a Narrative
 2. Questions go unanswered and answers are always questioned
 3. There are no "exclusive claims" of Christianity... only moral claims
 - b. It can only lead you to skepticism at best
 1. PM Christianity dies the death of 1000 qualifications!
 2. PM Christianity changes the dictionary but keeps the vocabulary
 3. PM Christianity doesn't have anything exclusive of real Christianity
3. Postmodern Christianity will leave you without ultimate hope!
 - a. To them, this world is more important than the next...
 1. No eschatology = you are without a clear hope!
 2. The focus upon "relevant" things, but not on "timeless" things
 3. They have a "growing and maturing" narrative as their hope
 - b. Our system makes sense of both this world AND then next...
 1. God qualifies events that happen in This Age
 2. He secures the events that happen in The Age to Come

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3. We have Christ as a sure hope (Hebrews 13:8)

Good Resources...

1. Writings...

- a. Michael Kruger, 10 Commandments of Progressive Christianity
- b. J. Gresham Machen, Christianity and Liberalism
- c. Alisa Childers, Another Gospel?
- d. Tim Keller, The Reason for God
- e. The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy

2. On the Web...

- a. Alisa Childers Podcast, Crossway Podcast
- b. Impact 360, Stand to Reason, Summit Ministries