

# **THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE A CRITIQUE OF POSTMODERNISM**

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Nearly 2000 years ago Pontius Pilate stood face to face with Truth. As he looked into the eyes of Truth, Pilate asked a question on behalf of humanity. His question has rung for 2000 years: "What is truth?" It is the question of the ages. Can the truth ultimately be known, and if so, how can one know that he possesses the truth?

This has been a question that the church has wrestled with for centuries. The church has fragmented into many groups and denominations over the issue of truth. Whose interpretation of Scripture is right and true? Can there be a church body that possesses the pure truth, whole and undefiled? If the truth can be known, why are there so many interpretations of the same passage? What is truth?

Pastors who have taught adult confirmation class have surely been confronted with the heartfelt inquiry of class members, "There are so many interpretations of the Bible, how can I know if this church's interpretation is correct?" What is truth?

Philosophers through the ages have sought to answer the question, "What is truth?" Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, the Scholastics, the Nominalists, the Empiricists, the Existentialists, the Rationalists, and many others have all attempted to come to grips with the truth not only in religion, but in all areas of knowledge. All attempts have fallen short, each attempt has been replaced with yet another attempt. What is truth?

Christianity has struggled with some of the hard teachings of the Bible. How are they to be understood? How are they to be interpreted? Can the presuppositions of philosophy teach us how to approach the interpretations of hard passages? Through the ages, segments of the church have used the philosophical methods of the day to try to help interpret scripture. For example, the Rationalists say that the supernatural does not exist, the supernatural is unreasonable. Can this presupposition be used to interpret the hard passages of scripture? Did Christ really, in a supernatural and miraculous way, rise from the dead, or shall we interpret this passage in a more rational way? What is truth?

Different cultures have struggled with one another over the issue of truth. What is ethical and what is not? What is the best form of government? How shall we view economics? What makes Christianity more true than any of the other world religions? As the information age has explosively stretched our knowledge of each culture, how can we be sure that ours is right? Is it not just one of many options? What is truth?

For 2000 years, there has been the struggle to arrive at truth. But now, at least for a time, the struggle has ended. Whether we know it or not, our society and our children are being persuaded to believe that there is no absolute truth. Pilate's question rings loud and clear, "What is truth?" Is the truth, ultimately, after millennia of failed attempts, unknowable?

The idea that there is no absolute truth is the basic concept of the "postmodern" era that we live in. While all of us to one degree or another, especially our youth, have been affected by postmodernism, most of us are unaware of postmodernism and what it is. The goal of this paper is to examine the basic concepts of postmodernism, to point out its flaws, to examine how it has

begun to effect parts of the church, and to identify ways to stand against the dangers it presents to the church.

### **What is Postmodernism?**

Postmodernism is a philosophy, a method of viewing life and everything about life. Unlike philosophies that have preceded it, it does not claim to offer a worldview, that is, a basic set of truths that tie all of life together in some meaningful way... because the basic concept behind postmodernism is that there are no absolute truths, no sure and certain foundations upon which our knowledge and beliefs can stand.

Scripture rejects this basic concept of postmodernism. Scripture teaches that there are things that are absolutely true, and that absolute truth is knowable. The words and concepts recorded in the Bible are absolute truth, true for all people, of all cultures, of all times. Our faith accepts and clings to these truths of God and finds its hope, comfort and guidance in them. Scripture time and again attests to its own truthfulness, and to our ability to know the truth:

- Revelation 3:7 “These are the words of Him who is holy and true.”
- John 17:17 “Sanctify them by the truth, Your Word is truth.”
- Ephesians 1:13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.
- James 1:18 He chose to give us birth through the Word of truth.
- Revelation 19:9 These are the true words of God.
- Revelation 21:5 Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.
- Ephesians 4:21 Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus Christ.
- John 14:16-17 “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever - the Spirit of truth.
- John 16:13 “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.”
- 1 John 4:6 We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

### **Is this really the philosophical view of the day?**

In a recent Gallup poll 88% of evangelicals surveyed claimed to believe that the Bible is the written Word of God, accurate in all it teaches, yet 53% of the same respondents claimed to believe there is no such thing as absolute truth.<sup>2</sup> In a similar poll, 70% of all Americans hold this same high view of scripture, but 66% of Americans and 72% of young people believe there is no absolute truth. Holding such mutually inconsistent truths is a sign of believing that there is no absolute truth.<sup>3</sup> In another survey, university students were asked if they believe there is such a thing as absolute truth. Their answers were along the following lines: “Truth is whatever you believe,” “There is no absolute truth,” “If there were such a thing as absolute truth how could we know what it is,” and “People who believe in absolute truth are dangerous.”<sup>4</sup>

During the past 30 years, views regarding sin have changed. When asked if premarital sex is wrong in 1969 at the height of the sexual revolution, 68% of Americans believed it was wrong. In 1987, considered a more “conservative” time, the number had dropped... only 46% of Americans felt premarital sex was wrong. By 1992 the number had dropped further... 33% of

Americans believed premarital sex was a sin. Surprisingly, that same year, only 17 % of Catholics felt premarital sex was wrong.<sup>5</sup> Gene Veith, author of “Postmodern Times, A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture,” says, “These polls suggest something new. While people have always committed sins, they at least acknowledged they were sins. A century ago a person may have committed adultery flagrantly and in defiance of God and man, but he would have admitted that what he was doing was a sin. What we have today is not only immoral behavior, but a loss of moral criteria. This is true even in the church. We face not only moral collapse, but a collapse of meaning. ‘There are no absolutes.’”<sup>6</sup>

Liberal theologian Martin Marty, speaking about the postmodern age, has said, “People pick and choose truths as if on a cafeteria line, until they get the right mixture or diet.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Why does postmodernism teach that truth is unknowable, that there is no absolute truth?**

These are the basic principles of postmodernism:

#### *Human language cannot express absolute truth.*

Postmoderns teach that what we experience in life can never fully be expressed in words. For example, to use the word “fearful” to describe how I feel about delivering this paper comes close to describing what I feel, but no mere words can really describe my ultimate feelings. At best, they can come close. So when I say I am “fearful,” your knowledge of how I feel is only partial. It is not complete. Therefore, postmoderns say, language is inadequate for imparting true knowledge.

In addition, postmoderns say that cultural differences make it impossible to know exactly what someone else is really thinking when he uses a certain word. We saw a perfect example of this in the news recently. When an American spy plane made a forced emergency landing on Chinese territory, the Chinese demanded an “apology.” As time went on, it became very evident, that there were serious cultural differences between the Chinese understanding of the word “apology” and the American understanding of the word “apology.” Postmoderns believe that all words have the same problems connected with them because of cultural differences. I may not understand what someone else is really thinking when he uses any given word. Culture has conditioned us to look at the meanings of words from our own perspective. I may never know what you really intended to say, because I may interpret the words that you used differently from how you interpret them. This leads postmoderns to say there is no absolute truth that can be expressed in words that will apply to all people of all times and cultures. Postmodernists believe this is also true of words or grammar in the Bible.

#### *History is unknowable*

Postmoderns would teach that there is no such thing as absolute history. Anything we know about history or the past comes from “someone else.” That “someone else” had a certain way of looking at things that was determined by his culture. For example, a Spanish explorer from the 1500’s may have been conditioned by his culture to believe that Christianity should dominate the world, even by force, if necessary. His accounts of what happened when he conquered the Incas will be colored by such a cultural belief. Postmoderns say that his historical account of what happened will be a report of *he believes* really happened. But his report will be biased. He will leave things out of his report that were unimportant to him. An Inca account of

the same events will be very different, and will include things that the Spaniard did not. But his account will also be biased by his cultural background. Because of this, postmoderns say that all history is only an interpretation of what the writer *believes* happened. There is no way to determine absolutely what really happened. Therefore history is arbitrary, and there is no absolute truth in history. One postmodern writer puts it this way, "Texts never tell us what happened; they only describe the perception of the authors. They are not objectively true but are the truth as perceived by that person through the bias of language and culture. Historical texts are interesting for discovering not what happened but how people's view of the world was skewed by their culture."<sup>1</sup> Postmodernists believe this is also true of biblical history.

#### *Our view of everything is culturally conditioned*

Postmoderns would say that our beliefs and the way we look at the world are not things we come up with on our own. We are products of our culture. The words and concepts that our culture uses shape how we look at everything. Because of this, the community is extremely important to the postmodern way of thinking. The community helps determine who I am and what I believe and how I think. Cultures or communities may be very large or very small. Most of us here, are part of the large culture or community known as "Americans." Americans have been culturally conditioned to look at justice differently from people of other cultures. Most of us here are also part of the ELS, which is a much smaller community that has helped shape who we are and what we believe. Our ELS culture is different from a Baptist culture. Every community has its own set of "truths" that may differ from, and even contradict the truths of another community. The key to postmodern thinking, is that each community has its own set of "truths" or beliefs that help its members react to life. Each community finds out "what works" for them. Postmoderns believe that no community or set of beliefs is inherently better than another, because there is no absolute truth. They believe this is also true of religious "communities" or faiths.

#### *Reason is replaced by experience as the ultimate authority*

Since human reason cannot help me arrive at any sort of absolute truth, something else must take the place of reason to help give direction in life. For the postmodern that "something else" is experience. Experience becomes the authority. Experience teaches me what "works" and what "doesn't work" as I live my life. Life becomes an attempt to find out not what is true, but to find out what "works for me." My community helps determine that.

#### *Relativism and tolerance are the result*

Relativism is the view that there is no absolute truth or falsehood, that there is no absolute right or wrong. This is the basic view of postmodernism. Because of this, postmoderns stress tolerance of other beliefs. Postmoderns teach that we must not act like our beliefs are better than anyone else's. All beliefs are equally valid. For them, this includes all religious beliefs. No belief is more "true" than another. No belief should be "put down." Postmoderns would say for example, that one person may believe homosexuality is wrong because of his cultural conditioning, while another may believe it is not wrong, because of his cultural conditioning. Neither view is right or wrong. Intolerance is a serious problem to postmoderns

because it implies that someone thinks his beliefs are true while someone else's are false. It implies that a person believes in absolute truth. To the postmodern, this is a grave mistake.

Our young people are being brought up in a world that expresses these views at every turn. Television, education, art, the humanities, science, politics, and all the disciplines to one degree or another subtly attack the view of absolute truth. Political correctness corrals our children from using words that may offend a different view from theirs... we must be tolerant of other views and not judge them. Gay rights activists are given air time on prime time and not judged negatively... we are being culturally conditioned. Our former president questioned the very meaning of words themselves when he said, "It depends on what the word 'is' means"... words have no ultimate meaning. Textbooks in school are rewriting history as interpreted from various viewpoints... pure history is unknowable. Classes are taught not in the instructor/student setting, rather, the class as a group is facilitated by the teacher and taught to question standards, and arrive at the best answer for them as a class...reason is no longer an authority. Fact and fiction are blurred in "reality" TV shows... what really is truth? Truth is culturally determined and experience is the authority.

### **Things Hollow and Deceptive**

The story is told that the Greeks fought against the city of Troy for ten years without conquering it. After ten long years of being unable to penetrate the Trojan defenses, the Greeks got into their ships and began to sail away, leaving behind a huge wooden horse on wheels at the city gates... apparently some sort of sacred gift or tribute. As the Greeks disappeared into the horizon, the Trojans wheeled the horse into the city and rejoiced. After so many years of fighting, it appeared as if the Trojans were victorious. Late that night, as the unsuspecting city slept, the belly of the great wooden horse opened up. Several soldiers slipped out and unlocked the city gates, where the other Greek soldiers, who had sailed back to shore in the darkness, were waiting. The city of Troy was taken captive by means of something hollow and deceptive - the Trojan horse.

Colossians 2:8 says, "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ." Over the centuries there have been many Trojan horses in the form of human philosophies that have been rolled into the unsuspecting church and have taken many captive. In Colossians 2:8 God warns us to beware of the deceptive nature of human philosophies and the harmful impact they can have on His church. Anything deceptive is opposed to the truth. Anything opposed to the truth can take one captive. As God's people we do not want to be taken captive; we want to be free. Christ told us, "If hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Human philosophies, like the Trojan horse, often appear inviting and harmless. They appear to have the answers to some of the difficult questions of life. They may appear helpful to the church. So the church wheels them into its midst, and the unsuspected destruction begins. For the past several generations the Trojan horse has been Rationalism. Rationalism held to the basic concept that science and reason could answer the questions of life. The Trojan horse of Rationalism was rolled into the church as a means to help interpret scripture. Maybe Rationalism could answer some of the hard questions of scripture. And it did. It decimated scripture. It presupposed that the supernatural is not real. On that basis it did away with verbal inspiration. It

did away with the miracles. It did away with the virgin birth. It did away with the deity of Christ. It did away with the Gospel. And many were taken captive.

Now a new Trojan Horse, a new philosophy, stands at the gates of the city. Some in the church have already opened the doors. As God's people we need to be aware of the philosophy of the age so that we are able to recognize it, recognize if it has slipped into the church, and sound the clear call to beware and to stand on guard against the hollow and deceptive philosophies which depend on human tradition and the basic principles of this world. The new Trojan Horse that stands at the gates is postmodernism. We need to know the concepts of postmodernism so that we can recognize it, and learn to stand against it, so that we and others will not be taken captive.

### **Human Reason**

How shall we respond to the postmodern concept of human reason? How useful are our rational capabilities for determining what is true? Postmoderns take a low view of human reason. This is not necessarily bad in and of itself. In places, scripture also takes a low view of human reason. To some extent, scripture agrees with postmodernism, that human reason is incapable of arriving at the truth. But there are serious differences.

*Postmodernism attacks human reason on every front, in every discipline, from science to art to religion, claiming that because of the limitations of language and our culturally conditioned view of life, reason is incapable of arriving at any sort of absolute truth, including religious truth.*

We differ from this view. Scripture attacks human reason not in all areas of life, but in one area only: spiritually. Ephesians 2:1 says, "You were dead in your trespasses and sins." Our sinful nature is so strongly evil, that it leaves us as dead men spiritually, incapable of making any movement toward God, especially rationally. Titus 1:5 says, "To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted." The unbelieving mind is corrupted, in fact so corrupted that Romans 8:7 says, "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so." The sinful mind cannot arrive at the right answers about spiritual things, in fact, it is even strongly hostile to the right answers. 1 Corinthians 2:14 pushes the sinful condition of our minds even further when it says, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." God's ways are not only undiscoverable to the sinful human mind, but appear to be the opposite of wisdom. God's ways appear foolish to the sinful human mind. And what appears more foolish to the human mind than the very essence of scripture, the Gospel... that God should become happy with me by putting someone else to death. Yes, the gospel is foolishness to those who are perishing. 2 Corinthians 4:3 says, "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." While we would agree with postmodernism that human reason is limited, we believe it is not only limited, but incapable and terribly misguided in spiritual matters not because of the limitations of human language and culture, but because of sin.

*Postmoderns teach that human reason cannot arrive at any absolute truth, including spiritual truth.* Therefore, they assume that the truth is ultimately unknowable, even in spiritual

matters. We, however, believe that even though sinful human reason is incapable of arriving at spiritual truth, the truth is nevertheless, knowable. We believe that since we cannot come to the truth on our own by using human reason, God has graciously provided a way for us to know the truth. He has revealed it to us through His Word. We believe that Scripture is the Word not of man, but of God on the basis of such passages as 2 Timothy 3:16 “All scripture is given by inspiration of God,” and 2 Peter 1:20-21 “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” We believe these words. We believe that every word of scripture is God’s Word, and therefore absolutely true and reliable. We believe that scripture is God’s revelation of Himself to the world, and that absolute truth, which applies to all people of all times, can be known not through human reason, but through divine revelation.

We do not arrive at the understanding that Scripture is true by using human reason. We are convinced scripture is true by the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Luther explained it well in “The Bondage of the Will” when he said, “If you speak of the internal clarity [of scripture], no man perceives one iota of what is in the Scriptures unless he has the Spirit of God. All men have a darkened heart, so that even if they can recite everything in Scripture, and know how to quote it, yet they apprehend and truly understand nothing of it. They neither believe in God, nor that they themselves are creatures of God, nor anything else, as Psalm 14:1 says: ‘The fool has said in his heart, There is no god.’ For the Spirit is required for the understanding of Scripture, both as a whole and in any part of it.”<sup>8</sup> In short, faith is required to accept Scripture as truth. The Holy Spirit has convinced us through the Word that we are lost and condemned sinners and has caused us to be troubled over a feeling of God’s wrath and a horror of God’s judgment and of hell. Having done so through the law, He has then comforted us through the gospel, assuring us that for Christ’s sake and because of His perfect life and His death on the cross we are declared not guilty, our sins are forgiven and we are right with God. The Holy Spirit has worked this faith in our hearts, giving us new hearts which trust the Bible to be the Word of God, true and reliable. In postmodernism, experience becomes the authority and replaces reason. If reason is incapable of arriving at an adequate view of life, then something else must take its place. For postmodernism that something else is human experience. Experience in my own community setting will convince me whether my particular view of life is one that works for me.

We would agree that experience plays a central role in our Christian faith. I experience the shame and guilt of my sin brought on by the law. I experience the joy of salvation brought on by the gospel. However, experience ought never be authoritative as a Christian determines what is true and real. Experience, like human reason, can be mistaken. I may feel guilty when I shouldn’t. I may not feel guilty when I should. If I base my beliefs on such experiences, I will be sadly misguided. I have something far more certain than life and all experience: the sure and certain commands and promises of God. When God promises my sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake, that is the foundation I can build on, even when experience tries to tell me otherwise and causes me to still experience the burden of my sin. In fact, we believe that experience will often seem to contradict God’s promises, which is why scripture defines faith as being certain of what we do not see. I may not see or experience God’s blessings in time of trouble, but faith is certain His blessings are there because faith is based on the promises of God, not on what I see and experience.

Postmodernism's view of human reason does not set us free. It claims that reason cannot lead us to the truth. Rather, it takes us captive to experience, which at best determines not what is true, but what "works for me." The Bible's view of reason, on the other hand sets us free. It enables us to see the sinfully corrupted powers of human reason in regard to spiritual truth. It teaches that spiritual truth can be known through the divine revelation of God's Word. It presents law and gospel through which the Holy Spirit works to bring faith to the heart, a faith which renews the mind and brings with it a sanctified use of human reason in interpreting scripture. It frees us from the hollow deception of human philosophy. "If hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

### **Language and History**

Language and history are problematic for the postmodern. Postmoderns believe that language does not convey truth, and history is unreliable. History is only what the author believed to be the truth given his cultural biases.

Language and history are very relevant topics for the Christian for this reason: We believe and teach that the correct method of Biblical interpretation is the method known as the "historical-grammatical" method. By examining the historical context of the text and by studying the original grammar of the text, we can arrive at the one intended meaning of the text. It is more than a little striking to note that it is these very foundations of history and grammar that the postmoderns attack in any search for absolute truth. To their way of thinking, the historical-grammatical method of biblical interpretation is an absurdity because of its reliance on language and history. Obviously, this implies a clear difference between true biblical interpretation and postmodern biblical interpretation.

Postmoderns believe that there are problems with every author, including biblical authors. Authors use words. Words can never really explain what someone is ultimately thinking. Words may have a different meaning to me than they did to the author. I can never be sure of the intended meaning of his words. Authors are conditioned by their culture to think a certain way. Therefore, an author's stories will be biased to his way of thinking. My culture may have taught me to look at things in a different way. I cannot assume that his way of looking at things is better than my way of looking at things. I may not even really understand his way of looking at things. Therefore, no one can ever know exactly what meaning the author intended when he wrote the text. This is a simplistic explanation of how postmoderns look at texts.

So how does a postmodern reader get any meaning out of a text? How does he interpret it? The postmodern believes that the author is not the authority over the text, because his intended meaning can never really be discovered or understood. Therefore, the reader must insert his own meaning into the text. There is not one correct interpretation of a text. There are many possible interpretations. The reader will try to find a meaning that fits in well with his own community's way of looking at things. The reader becomes the authority over the text.

To us, this all sounds quite absurd, but this is the sad direction in which society is headed. Now feminists can read the Bible and insert their own meaning into the texts, as can every other special interest group and denomination. No one can say that one interpretation is better than another.

Anyone who assumes that he stands as the authority over the text, rather than the text standing as the authority over him, has fallen into profound arrogance. We believe in verbal

inspiration, “that the Holy Spirit , in a miraculous way, breathed into the minds of the writers the very thoughts they should express, and the very words they should use. This doctrine of verbal inspiration assures us that the Bible is God’s Word and therefore contains no errors in any of its parts or words.” (ELS Catechism, questions #4 and #6) We believe that God is the author of the text and that He used human instruments to record His divine intended meaning. God does not have cultural biases. God does not use language that is unclear. God does not make assumptions about absolute truths that are faulty. Scripture is God’s Word and we are not the judge of scripture. Rather, scripture is our judge. Luther said, we “must not be scripture’s judge - we must remain its pupils”<sup>9</sup> and “with scripture as judge we can differentiate between true and false doctrine”<sup>10</sup> The Formula of Concord states, “We believe, teach and confess that the sole rule and standard according to which all dogmas together with all teachers should be estimated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic scriptures of the Old and New Testaments alone, as it is written in Psalm 119:105 ‘Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.’ And St. Paul writes ‘Though an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you, let him be accursed.’ Galatians 1:8” M. Teske in an essay in “The Word of God in the Lutheran Church” wrote, “If we interpret scripture on the basis of preconceived notions or opinions we become guilty of setting ourselves above scripture; we are then in fact telling God what He is supposed to mean or what He is saying.”<sup>11</sup> Quenstedt states so well, “The... holy scriptures in the original text are the infallible truth and are free from every error, or in other words, in the... holy scriptures there is found no lie, no falsity, no error, not even the least, whether in subject matter or words, but all things and all the details that are handed down in them are most certainly true, whether they pertain to doctrine, or morals, or history, or chronology, or topography, or nomenclature; neither ignorance, nor thoughtlessness or forgetfulness, nor lapse of memory, can and dare be ascribed to the ... Holy Ghost.”<sup>12</sup>

We believe that the historical-grammatical approach to interpretation is the only approach which lets God be the authority and scripture the judge. David Kuske in “Interpretation: The Only Right Way” states regarding the historical-grammatical method:

“History... has a twofold relationship to God’s Word. First, Scripture relates historical events that either accompany or are a basic part of the way in which God accomplished our salvation... Secondly, the words of the Bible have a historical setting or background because of the way in which God chose to have his Word written down for mankind... The historical setting of words simply means: who is speaking, to whom, where, when and why... For this reason the Bible interpreter must concern himself with the historical setting of a passage in Scripture if he wants to do full justice to his task.”<sup>13</sup>

Concerning grammar he says,

“The inspired words of Scripture must be understood only according to the one obvious sense that they convey in common usage. Otherwise what God wants to communicate to us through these words is not what he wants to say to us but what we decide we want to hear him say to us... The Bible can make the child wise and give understanding to the simple because the meaning of its words is that which is conveyed by common usage. Thus, Scripture has an objective clarity in all it says. We might fail to grasp the one intended sense because of our sinful nature, which may blind us to a truth. Or our weak faith and understanding might be the problem... But if one fails to grasp the one intended sense there is one thing that this failure does not give him the right to do. It does not give him the license to deny the clarity of Scripture and to give the words a different meaning... In the Bible, God speaks in human language. Before the pages of Scripture can be

understood theologically, they must be understood grammatically, that is, in terms of the common usage of the biblical languages. The first step is the study of the meaning each word has in a given context. The second step is the syntax of the words - how they are arranged in a group and the meaning they take from the particular way in which they are grouped. The interpreter will understand the words literally unless some of them are clearly designated as being figurative. The task of the interpreter, then is to find the one divinely intended sense of each passage since the only meaning of the words of Scripture is the simple, plain meaning.”<sup>14</sup>

We believe that each passage of Scripture has one intended meaning, not many interpretations as the postmoderns believe. Unlike the postmoderns, we believe that the original intent of the author, who is God, can be discovered by letting scripture interpret itself using the historical-grammatical method. Unlike the postmoderns, we believe that there is an external clarity to scripture. The postmodern view undermines the fact that the doctrines taught in Scripture state objective truths. While postmoderns believe that they are free to interpret the text the way they wish without seeking the absolute truth of the text, we believe the opposite. The very truth revealed in the text of the scripture is what sets us free from falsehood and bondage to sin.

### **Cultural conditioning**

Postmodernism does not teach that the individual determines his own view of life. Postmodernism teaches that the community determines, to a large extent, how each individual views life. In a sense, the individual submits himself to communal authority. For example, if I grew up in Western civilization, my culture determined for me that truths cannot contradict one another. On the other hand, if I grew up in Eastern civilization, my culture determined for me that there can indeed be truths that are contradictory, and that this is not a problem. The individuals in each culture work with the set of assumptions handed down to them by their culture. The point is, that the community is an essential part of how life is viewed and lived. With this in mind, postmodern thought has begun to manifest itself in Christianity.

Robert Webber, a postmodern theologian, states, “the community is an extension of Jesus, a communal society in which the social unit is the community rather than the individual. What this means for the church is that Christianity must recover the primacy of being a Christian community. People come to faith not because they see the logic of the argument, but because they have experienced a welcoming God in a hospitable and loving community.”<sup>15</sup>

When this theologian states, “People come to faith not because they see the logic of the argument, but because they have experienced a welcoming God in a hospitable and loving community,” this is a blatant denial of the power of the Holy Spirit to work through the means of grace, the Word and Sacraments, by which He alone creates, sustains and strengthens faith. We do not accept either of this postmodern’s options. It is not the logic of the argument that brings a person to faith. It is the Holy Spirit working through law and gospel, which appear foolish to human reason. Nor is it experiencing the Christian community that brings a person to faith. At best, experiencing a loving community can cause a person to be interested in hearing the Word. To the postmodern, the Christian community is seen to have greater importance and power in creating faith than the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. The community becomes more important than the means of grace. Christian groups which deny the power of the means of grace will be susceptible to this kind of thinking. Many churches are very active in trying to offer a

community “feel” to their congregation. Those brought up in the postmodern generation will be susceptible to finding a church based on its community “feel.”

Are we as confessional Lutherans at a disadvantage? Do we have a community “feel” to offer? Can we not offer community of the most profound order? Do we not teach the justification of the sinner as our chief doctrine? Is it not this very teaching that breaks down the walls of hostility between God and man and between man and man. Is it not true that by faith in Christ we are all made one? Is it not true that by justification we all become a part of the body of Christ? Is it not true that in Christ there is no male or female, Jew or Greek, slave or free? Is there not one faith, one hope, one Lord, one Baptism, one Spirit which unites us all? Ought not our congregations of all congregations display this unity of the justified. As we continue to preach and teach law and gospel, sin and grace, what unity is created in our midst by the Holy Spirit! It is the very means of grace that have the power to bring to faith and to create a unity, a community of believers... the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints!

The postmodern position on the importance of the community in determining how life is viewed has another disturbing impact on Christianity. Stanley Grenz, a postmodern evangelical, in an essay entitled, “To Boldly Go Where No Evangelical Has Gone Before” writes, “Since truth is not eternal and unitary and since we are conditioned by our social and historical setting, all knowledge is also similarly limited and relative. Rather than being individual, truth is social or a product of the community of which the knower is a part. The specific truths we accept, as well as the very conception of truth that we hold are conditioned by the groups to which we belong.”<sup>16</sup> Biblical interpretation is done by “each generation of readers as they bring their own presuppositions, their own cultural formation and their own issues to the text.”<sup>17</sup> Another postmodern author writes, “many specialists in [biblical interpretation] argue that understanding a text requires an interpretive community whose shared assumptions and shared language make interpretation possible.” This all implies that there is no single interpretation of the texts of scripture that stand for every age and every community. It implies that the interpretation of the texts can and will change from age to age and community to community. Interpretation to postmoderns is, not “What do the Words mean to the whole Church of God?”, rather, “What do we think the Words mean only to our particular group?” In this view, the ruling norm that determines truth is not the Word, but the group or community to which we belong. The group stands over and above the Word.

We, on the other hand, believe the opposite. We believe that God’s Word stands over the church. We believe that the Church is the product of the Word. The Word creates the Church as the Holy Spirit works through it to convict us of our sin and bring us to faith in Christ’s redemption, won on the cross. The Word of God is the ruling norm for the church. The interpretation of a text does not change from age to age and community to community.

Since postmoderns do not believe in absolute truth, there is no such thing as unity based on truth. At best there is unity based on group consensus. We however, believe the opposite. There is absolute truth, and unity is based upon adherence to the truth. Romans 16:17 “I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.” 1 Corinthians 1:10, “I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.”

## Tolerance

Madison Wisconsin has a newspaper circulated by University of Wisconsin students called "The Isthmus." In a recent article, one of the reporters investigated some of the "megachurches" in the Madison area. Listen to his postmodern view of religion: "It seems equally possible that people worshipping as Catholics or liberal Protestants or Jews or Buddhists or Muslims might be finding salvation, and so might people who worship the sun or who don't worship at all. I don't claim to know all the ways that salvation is doled out. At this point, conservative Christians would bring up John 14:6, where Jesus says, 'I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.' And as a liberal Christian, I need to make sense of that; I cannot simply pretend the statement isn't there. To me, the statement has always meant that while Christ has the power to give eternal salvation, we have no idea what that means or how it's done. Evangelicals take it to mean that salvation comes only when you say a formulaic prayer, something like, 'Jesus is my personal Lord and Savior.' Eternal life is a strange, awesome concept; to believe in it is tough enough, to believe you know the only way to achieve it, that's mind-boggling. And this brings me to the main shortcoming, a potentially dangerous shortcoming, of the new American suburban evangelicals. They refuse to think with an open mind about scripture, and, in some cases, their refusal causes their theology to become spoon-fed, tunnel-visioned and combative. They have power, money and numbers. And they have the ability to divide entire cities and nations with their power and their theology."<sup>18</sup>

Whether he realizes it or not, this young man is thoroughly indoctrinated in postmodern thinking. The strongest ethic taught by postmodernism is tolerance. No belief or lifestyle should be judged. Every belief and lifestyle is as valid as the other. If there is no absolute truth, we have no right to impose our way of thinking upon others. We must respect all beliefs. Christians must not claim exclusive rights to the truth.

It is true that Christians ought to be "tolerant" people in the sense of being loving toward all, but not for the reasons that postmodernism gives. We must be loving and respectful and even "tolerant" of all people, but not because their views have an equal footing with scripture. Christians love all people, even their enemies, not because their beliefs are as valid as ours, but because Christ's gracious love for us motivates us to love others. 1 John 4:10, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." Romans 5:8, "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Philippians 2:3-5, "In humility, consider others better than yourselves... Your attitude should be that same as that of Christ Jesus." True love for those who believe and live differently than we do will involve a love for their souls. True love will point out sin and call to repentance. True love will proclaim the saving gospel message. True love will seek to convert sinners to faith in Christ. True love will point out falsehood. True love is not satisfied to let others stay lost in false beliefs.

Christianity is not one among many equally valid religions. Christianity is by its very nature not inclusive of other belief systems. It is exclusive. Jesus said, John 14:6, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Acts 4:12 says, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." Christianity does not accept any other way of salvation than by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Christianity is exclusive, which means we believe that

we have the only truth, the only true way to be saved. We also believe that other religions are wrong, mistaken and false.

The one “sin” that postmodernism recognizes is intolerance. To a postmodern, I am intolerant if I believe that the truth I to cling is the only correct truth and that other beliefs are wrong. Such a view is considered dangerous by many postmoderns. Could it be that the Church will begin to feel persecution because it claims that it alone has the truth? It has happened before. Gene Veith says, “The Roman Empire was, to say the least, a pluralistic society. Though they had lost their ancient virtues, Romans were supremely tolerant. The only people they could not tolerate were the Christians. During the persecutions Christians who refused to recant their faith had their legal rights suspended and could be instantly put to death - under a legal system otherwise scrupulously fair. According to historian Stephen Benko, in his study of the anti-Christian propaganda in imperial Rome, one of the main reasons the early Christians were persecuted so cruelly was that they claimed to possess exclusive truth. In its decay Roman culture had become something like postmodernist culture, advocating cultural relativism... and the validity of all religions (as long as they burned incense to Caesar). The Christians’ refusal to acknowledge this was bad enough. But what galled the Romans and whipped them into a murderous rage, as Benko shows, was that these low-life primitive slaves claimed to possess the only truth.”<sup>19</sup>

There is pressure from the world for Christians to affirm that other religions are as valid as ours. There is also pressure from within Christendom for Christians to be affirming of other Christian denominations and beliefs. Robert Webber, a postmodern theologian, states, “The church throughout history has unfolded in many cultures and therefore no one expression of the church stands alone as the true visible body of Christ. This means that we must affirm the church in its different paradigms... A goal for evangelicals in the postmodern world is to accept diversity as a historical reality, but to seek unity in the midst of it. This perspective will allow us to see Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant churches as various forms of the one true church--all based on apostolic teaching and authority... one way of experiencing the unity of the church is to affirm that it is a community of communities.”<sup>20</sup> and “The church is not divided over whether humans are sinners whose only hope is in the death and resurrection of Christ, but in its disagreement on how this is to be explained. Thus the Holy Spirit brings consensus... Denominational confessions are personal opinions... Theology in a postmodern world recognizes that all interpretations of the truth must be understood in their cultural context. For example, the confessions of Luther and Calvin are best understood against the background of the late medieval interpretations of Christianity, which they regarded as perverse.”<sup>21</sup>

Webber’s point is that different Christian denominations are to affirm one another’s beliefs, because it is mere opinion, not disagreement over truth that separates us. He believes that among all denominations there is basic consensus that our only hope is in Christ. The only difference is opinion on how this is to be interpreted. This is a call to a new sort of ecumenism, or unity across denominational lines, based not on agreement, but on tolerance.

Let’s look at an example. Recently, the ELCA and the Roman Catholics entered into discussions to try to come to consensus on the doctrine of justification. The doctrine of justification has divided Lutherans and Catholics for nearly 500 years. These two church bodies were able to come up with a document on the doctrine of justification that both could agree to. How did this happen? “Ministry,” a periodical of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, explains

the Joint Declaration on Justification this way: “The easier road to take in these days of agnosticism and postmodern relativism is to simply acknowledge that we have two systems that have unfolded from the scriptures, the creeds and tradition, which express themselves through different thought forms and languages and that together we must bring them side by side, attached by mutual respect, spurning any inclination to insist on absolute agreement. But is this a sound approach? Can one really claim that two or more contradictory theological statements can best serve the cause of Christian unity? Some of the differences we are facing in the Joint Document are not simply matters of language or emphasis. They are not even just differences in the theological expressions of the faith. Instead they are differences in the faith itself. They concern aspects of substance, and they are hardly compatible. They are not convergent but contradictory and divergent, in matters not only of doctrine but of church life and practice. Consensus declarations such as the one under review too often carry with them the scent of compromise. They imperil the integrity of the church.”<sup>22</sup>

To those who are unaware of the postmodern practice of permitting conflicting truth claims to stand side by side, it may appear as if agreement in interpretation has been reached by the ELCA and the Roman Catholics on the doctrine of Justification. This is not the case, however. The Joint Declaration is more a postmodern document of relativism and tolerance of differing views. In such a case, unity is based upon tolerance rather than upon agreement in doctrine.

I believe that our youth will especially be assaulted by society’s view of tolerance. Our youth will strongly be pressured to affirm beliefs that are contrary to scripture. What must we do?

- We should clearly teach our youth that the world will pressure them to be relativistic. There will be pressure for them to hold that the beliefs of others are just as valid or “true” as theirs. They will be pressured to believe that Christianity is not the only true religion. We must teach them that this is a faulty assumption of the world. Christianity is exclusive in its claims. We can lead them to the opening lines of the Athanasian Creed which so clearly state, “Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic (universal) faith. Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.” We should teach our youth that love and tolerance do not mean that other religions are to be given equal standing. We should teach comparative religions, and show how their teachings are contradictory to scripture. They need to know this in a relativistic world.
- We should teach our youth that Christianity is opposed by many because it claims to have exclusive rights to the truth. We should teach them that they may be persecuted for believing they have the only absolute truth. We can lead them to the example of the early church and the example of our forefathers, who bravely stood for the unpopular teachings of Christianity and were persecuted for it. We can teach our members that the scriptures say that we will be persecuted. (2 Timothy 3:10-17) We should teach them that when the world persecutes us, they are really persecuting Christ. (Acts 22:7-8) We should teach our members how to react and what to do when they are persecuted. (Acts 5:41-42, 2 Corinthians 12:10, Matthew 5:42-42, Romans 12:14, 1 Corinthians 4:12, Acts 11:19-21) The persecuted church is also the witnessing church!

- We should teach our youth that the world does not believe absolute truth is knowable. We should explain to them that this is a false teaching. As we explain verbal inspiration we can lead our youth to the comfort of knowing that God has revealed absolute truth to us in His Word.
- We should teach our youth that the world relies on experience to determine what works. We should point out the faultiness of this view. We have something far more certain than all experience: The promises of God which can never change or fail.
- We should explain to our youth why there are so many different interpretations of the Bible. We should teach them that some people rely on reason, or experience, or emotions, or the opinions of others to shape the meaning of the text. We should teach them that there is only one intended meaning of a passage. The only correct interpretation is the one that does not let human reason, experience, emotions, or the opinions of others shape the meaning of the text. The simple meaning of words of the text are the authority, even when they seem to go against human reason. We should teach that true biblical interpretation arrives at the one true intended meaning, and that other interpretations are therefore invalid and false.
- We ought to use the affirmative statements in the catechism which teach what we do believe as an opportunity to explain what we do not believe as well, so that our youth understand that scripture teaches us not only that there is truth, but there is such a thing as falsehood. We ought to show them that scripture enables us to recognize falsehood, and remind them that we live in a world that does not recognize falsehood.
- We ought to point out to our youth that we live in a world that teaches not only doctrinal but also moral relativism. As we teach the ten commandments, what an opportunity to explain that the world will attempt to undo the concept of sin through moral relativism. This is the world's way of getting rid of its guilt. What an opportunity to lead our youth to the only One who can do away with our guilt, our Savior, who by the truth of the gospel sets us free from guilt forever. The truth shall set you free indeed!
- We can speak to our youth about the comfort that scripture has to offer for those in a postmodern age who have no real authority or foundation in their lives, and therefore no real hope or anchor on which to stand. We can talk about the house built on sand and the house built on the rock. Our foundation is Christ. Our sure and certain authority is His Word.

### **Worship and Marketing**

Wade Clark Roof, an author and religion professor at the University of California - Santa Barbara, has dubbed baby boomers and beyond as the "Quest Generation," "people more concerned with intense spiritual experience than doctrine or theology."<sup>23</sup> This is all part of a postmodern mind set. Propositional truth is replaced by something else... by what works, by what offers the best experience.

Consider this recent letter sent to our home by a new mission church starting in the Madison area: "Hi Neighbor! At last! A New Church for those who have given up on traditional services! Let's face it... many people are not active in church these days. Why? Busy lifestyle or job doesn't allow for it. The sermons are boring and don't relate to daily living. Members are unfriendly to visitors. You wonder about the quality of the nursery care for your little ones. Do

you think attending church should be an enjoyable experience? WE HAVE GOOD NEWS FOR YOU! New Hope is a church designed to meet your needs in these busy times. We're a group of friendly, happy people who have discovered the joy of the Christian lifestyle. At New Hope you: Meet new friends and get to know your neighbors; Enjoy exciting music with a contemporary flavor; Hear positive, practical messages which uplift you each week; Trust your children to the care of dedicated nursery workers. I invite you to be my guest at our first public celebration....If you don't have a church home, give us a try! Discover the difference!"

The entire message of this invitation caters to a specific mind set... a postmodern mind set. Doctrine, teaching, scripture, God's Word, Christ, salvation, grace, truth are not mentioned in this letter. The assumption seems to be that the target audience is not much interested in truth, doctrine or theology. On the other hand, the letter seems to assume that what the target audience is primarily interested in is a good religious experience. The entire invitation hinges on the promise of a good religious experience. Experience is the only authority left for the postmodern world.

Churches more and more seem to be offering worship services that cater to experience, to a contemporary way of looking at things, to celebration and to feeling good. Doctrine is downplayed. Contemporary Christian music is often praise oriented and empty of other doctrinal content, not teaching the full counsel of God. It seldom touches on the chief doctrines of law and gospel and justification of the sinner before God. Contemporary Christian music brings the pop culture and the culture of the world into the church. The church is no longer the place where we can step out of the world. The church is learning the entertainment techniques of the world. The chancel, altar and pulpit are replaced with a stage. If people may be turned off by denominational names, they are dropped. After all, words and language, to a postmodern world, can be problematic. Why confuse seekers with denominational names?

Is it important for membership growth that we in our churches of the ELS incorporate the methods of worship and marketing that may be attractive to the postmodern mind set? Should we offer experience above all else? If we believe that the Holy Spirit works through experience rather than through truth, then let us strive to offer experience better than anyone else. We however, believe that the Holy Spirit works through the truth, and the truth is found in the Word alone. Our services are drawn from the holy scriptures and are designed to cause us to sit at the feet of our Lord as he speaks through the holy scriptures. We negate the power of the Word when we give the impression that experience is more important than doctrine, which is exactly what the postmodern age believes.

How shall we "market" our churches? "Let us teach our members to be good witnesses, to invite their unchurched acquaintances to our churches so that they can see and hear what we in the ELS are all about, i.e., so that they can hear God's Word preached and taught, and can see the Sacraments administered. And then let it to the Lord who alone by his Spirit works faith in men's hearts through the Gospel. Article V of our Augsburg Confession is very much to the point, where we confess: 'that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith, where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake.'"<sup>24</sup>

## Thoughts

Ultimately, postmodernism's basic principles pose a danger if they are brought into the church.

Even if the views of postmodernism are not brought into the ELS, they will still be abused by Satan in this world to try to tempt us and our children away from absolute truth into the abyss of doctrinal and moral relativism.

Postmodernism's end result in the church is a glorification of the will of man over the will of God. The communal human will sits in the throne and chooses what to believe, since there is no absolute truth. The authority of God's absolute truth, the Word of Truth, is dethroned. When this happens, only tragic results can follow. Our will, just like our reason is fallen. We need to be saved from ourselves, including from a will that has no power to choose or come to God on its own terms. Only the Holy Spirit working through the truth can set us free from sin, death, hell, and falsehood through the saving Gospel of Christ and give us a will that wants to serve our Savior.

Postmodernism teaches that experience is the ultimate judge. It's main question is not, "Is this true?", but, "Does this work?" It will ask, "Does Christianity work for me?" It will be tempted to look for visible results. Those who look for visible results are driven to look at how they live their lives. The experience of a Christian lifestyle will become more important than the Cross of Christ. One postmodern evangelical explains Christianity this way, "His (Christ's) rulership extends over all life. What we do, say and think must be executed under his rule. Our eating, sleeping, drinking, judging, and loving must all take place under the rule of the king. He is the lord of life - all life. Thus the inauguration of the new age is not merely some intrusion into the secular world, or a spiritual component that runs alongside of life... It is this theology which is pertinent to our postmodern world."<sup>25</sup> This statement is entirely law oriented. It is only about what I do for Christ, not what Christ has done for me. It seeks its own righteousness. It holds us in bondage to our own attempts to live a good life. In order to be free, we need a different righteousness, a righteousness not our own. Only justification sets us free from our sins, gives us a righteousness not our own that comes by faith, and frees us from bondage to live sanctified lives for our Savior.

### Nothing New Under the Sun

What is truth? The very heart of postmodernism is skepticism. Skepticism regarding whether truth is knowable is nothing new. Nearly 500 years ago Martin Luther was challenged by a man considered to be one of the greatest thinkers of his time: Erasmus. Erasmus challenged Luther's teaching regarding the bondage of the will. Erasmus claimed to be a skeptic in this matter, saying that scripture is not clear on this subject, and that Luther ought to be careful not to make assertions. Erasmus claimed that it is best to leave such questions open. The truth cannot be known for sure, because scripture is unclear, he said.

Luther was outraged at Erasmus' skepticism regarding the clarity of scripture. Let us close with Luther's response to skepticism. "In short, what you say here seems to mean that it does not matter to you what anyone believes anywhere, so long as the peace of the world is undisturbed, and that in case of danger to life reputation, property, and goodwill, it is permissible to act like the fellow who said, "Say they yea, yea say I; say they nay, nay say I," and to regard Christian dogmas as no better than philosophical and human opinions, about which it is quite

stupid to wrangle, contend, and assert, since nothing comes of that but strife and the disturbance of outward peace. Things that are above us, you would say, are no concern of ours. So, with a view to ending our conflicts, you come forward as a mediator, calling a halt to both sides, and trying to persuade us that we are flourishing our swords about things that are stupid and useless... by such tactics you only succeed in showing that you foster in your heart a ... pig... who, having no belief in God himself, secretly ridicules all who have a belief and confess it. Permit us to be assertors, to be devoted to assertions and delight in them, while you stick to your Skeptics and Academics till Christ calls you to. The Holy Spirit is no Skeptic, and it is not doubts or mere opinions that he has written on our hearts, but assertions more sure and certain than life itself and all experience...<sup>26</sup>

Nothing more pernicious could be said than this [that God's Word is obscure], for it has led ungodly men to set themselves above the Scriptures and to fabricate whatever they pleased, until the Scriptures have been completely trampled down and we have been believing and teaching but the dreams of madmen. In a word, that saying is no human invention, but a virus sent into the world by the incredible malice of the prince of all demons himself..."<sup>27</sup>

"What are the apostles doing when they prove their own preachings by the Scriptures? Are they trying to obscure for us their own darkness with yet greater darkness? Or to prove something well known by something known less well? What is Christ doing in John 5:39, where he tells the Jews to search the Scriptures because they bear witness to him? What are those people in Acts 17:11 doing, who after hearing Paul were reading the Scriptures day and night to see if these things were so? Do not all these things prove that the apostles, like Christ himself, point us to the Scriptures as the very clearest witness to what they themselves say? What right have we, then, to make them obscure? I ask you, are these words of Scripture obscure or ambiguous: "God created heaven and earth": "the Word became flesh": and all those affirmations which the whole world has taken as articles of faith? And where have they been taken from? Isn't it from the Scriptures?"

And what is it that preachers do, to this very day? Do they interpret and expound the Scriptures? Yet if the Scripture they expound is uncertain, who can assure us that their exposition is certain? Another new exposition? And who will expound the exposition? At this rate we shall go on forever. In short, if Scripture is obscure or ambiguous, what point was there in God's giving it to us? Are we not obscure and ambiguous enough without having our obscurity, ambiguity, and darkness augmented for us from heaven? What, then, will become of that word of the apostle: "All Scripture inspired by God is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction" 2 Timothy 3:16?... But I fancy I have long since grown wearisome, even to dullards, by spending so much time and trouble on a matter that is so very clear. But that impudent and blasphemous saying that the Scriptures are obscure had to be overwhelmed in this way so that even you, my dear Erasmus, might realize what you are saying when you deny that Scripture is crystal clear. For you are bound to admit at the same time that all your saints whom you quote are much less crystal clear. For who is there to make us sure of their light if you make the Scriptures obscure? So those who deny that the Scriptures are quite clear and plain leave us nothing but darkness."<sup>28</sup>

Lord Jesus Christ, with us abide,  
For round us falls the eventide;  
Nor let Thy Word, that heav'nly light,

For us be ever veiled in night.

In these last days of sore distress  
Grant us, dear Lord, true steadfastness  
That pure we keep, till life is spent,  
Thy holy Word and Sacrament.

Rev. Mark F. Bartels

## Endnotes

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- <sup>3</sup> Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books. 1994). p. 16
- <sup>4</sup> Op. cit, McCallum, p.31
- <sup>5</sup> Op. cit, Veith, p.17
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- <sup>12</sup> Ibid, 9
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- <sup>14</sup> Ibid, 70-104
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- <sup>17</sup> Op. cit, Webber, pp. 189-190
- <sup>18</sup> Dean Bakopoulos, *Isthmus*, "Mega Churches", December 22, 2000. p. 11
- <sup>19</sup> Op. cit, Veith, pp. 229-230
- <sup>20</sup> Op. cit, Webber, p. 85
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid, 193-195

- <sup>22</sup> Raoul Dederen, *Ministry*, “The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification: One Year Later”, November, 2000, p. 13
- <sup>23</sup> Op. cit, Bakopoulos, p.11
- <sup>24</sup> Harry K. Bartels, “Music in the Church: For Entertainment or for the Glory of God?”, Essay to the ELS General Pastoral Conference, October 24, 2000, p. 20
- <sup>25</sup> Op. cit, Webber, pp. 94-107
- <sup>26</sup> Op. cit, Rupp and Watson, pp. 108-109
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid, 158-162
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid, 158-162