

Journal of Theology

Spring 2016

Volume 56

Number 1

CONTENTS

- An Exegesis of Malachi 2:17-3:6 3
Andrew A. Schaller
- Youth, Truth, and Postmodernism.18
David L. W. Pfeiffer

Journal of Theology

Editor: Wayne C. Eichstadt / 11315 E. Broadway Avenue / Spokane Valley, WA 99206 / editor@journaloftheology.org / (509) 926-3317

Assistant Editor: Norman P. Greve

Business Manager: Benno Sydow / 2750 Oxford St. North/ Roseville, MN 55113 / bennosydow@yahoo.com

Staff Contributors: D. Frank Gantt, David T. Lau, Nathanael N. Mayhew, Bruce J. Naumann, Paul G. Naumann, John K. Pfeiffer, David J. Reim, Michael J. Roehl, Steven P. Sippert, David P. Schaller, Paul M. Tiefel II, Mark S. Tiefel

Cover Redesign: Rachel Naumann

Correspondence regarding subscriptions, renewals, changes of address, failed delivery, and copies of back issues should be directed to the Business Manager.

Correspondence regarding material published in the *Journal of Theology* should be directed to the editor.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture identified as ESV is taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

© 2016 by the Church of the Lutheran Confession. Please contact the editor for permission to reproduce more than brief excerpts or other “fair use.”

The *Journal of Theology* is the theological journal of the Church of the Lutheran Confession. The *Journal of Theology* is designed to deepen the understanding and sharpen the skills of those who teach the Word of God. The *Journal of Theology* also testifies to the confession of our church body and serves as a witness to Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, and His unchanging Word.

The *Journal of Theology* is published four times annually (Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter) by authorization of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (501 Grover Road, Eau Claire, WI 54701 / www.clclutheran.org). **U.S. Subscriptions:** \$20.00 for one year, \$38.00 for two years. **Foreign Subscriptions:** \$30.00 for one year.

An Exegesis of Malachi 2:17-3:6

Andrew A. Schaller

Overview

In about 444 B.C., Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem to help rebuild the shattered walls of the city. When he arrived, he found a people who were engaged in the sins that had caused the Babylonian Captivity in the first place. The situation was grave. The people were indifferent. They were intermarrying with their heathen neighbors and worshipping their false gods. They were cheating the LORD by not bringing their best heartfelt gifts of thanksgiving to Him. They had a false sense of security regarding their relationship with God. The priests were neglecting their duties. Instead of simply condemning and destroying His wayward people, the Almighty had mercy and sent the prophet Malachi.

The message that the LORD of hosts gave to Malachi is called a “burden” because it was a difficult message and a severe warning against the backsliding people of God. In striking fashion, the LORD speaks to His people, repeats His Word of promise, and then contrasts that Word with their words of doubt and unbelief. This began in the first chapter of Malachi with these words: *“I have loved you,” says the LORD. ‘Yet you say, “In what way have You loved us?”’* (Malachi 1:2).

The words, “yet you say,” ring out in this short book from chapter to chapter (see 1:6-8, 13; 2:13-14) and call for the judgment of those who would question and deny the LORD of hosts.

Immediate Context

The second chapter begins with the LORD’s rebuke of the unfaithful priests. He warned them that if they did not give honor to His name, they would be cursed (2:1-3). The LORD also compares and contrasts the service of a faithful Levite priest with the unfaithfulness of the current priests (2:4-9).

The priests were not the only ones unfaithful to the LORD. Many of the people of Judah had taken their love from the LORD and given it to other “gods.” Still they went through the motions in the temple and profaned the

Editor’s Note: This Old Testament exegesis was first published in the *Journal of Theology*, December 2015 (Volume 55, Number 4). Unfortunately, there were numerous errors in the Hebrew of that publication. The exegesis is being republished in this issue with corrected Hebrew. This version will replace the former in our online archive at www.journaloftheology.org.

sanctuary of the LORD. They showed the ultimate disrespect for the LORD by coming to His temple to “worship” Him though in their hearts they had left Him.

They were also unfaithful to God’s commandments. Many divorced their wives and sought to marry heathen women. Still they wondered and whined, “Why doesn’t the Lord receive our offerings with favor?” What was the problem? Their sins had turned the LORD’s face from them. The words of Isaiah seem particularly applicable, “Your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:2).

The previous section in Malachi concludes with the sobering words, “So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless” (Malachi 2:16 ESV).

“In this section the prophet’s words are directed against the spirit of discontent and murmuring which prevailed among the people, who lost faith in all the promises of God, because the expected manifestation of the glory of the Lord for the good of His People did not take place at once, and in their despair called even the holiness and justice of God in question, and began to deny the coming of the Lord to judge the world. The prophet lets the feelings of the people express themselves in ch. ii. 17, for the purpose of meeting them with an announcement of the day of the Lord and its true nature, in ch. iii and iv.”¹

Malachi 2:17²

הוֹגַעְתֶּם יְהוָה בְּדַבְרֵיכֶם וְאָמַרְתֶּם בְּמָה הוֹגַעְנוּ
בְּאָמְרֵיכֶם כֹּל-עֲשֵׂה רָע טוֹב בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה וּבָהֶם
הוּא חָפֵץ אוֹ אֵיהָ אֱלֹהֵי הַמִּשְׁפָּט:

Literal Translation

You (pl.) have worn out Jehovah with your (pl.) words and you say, “With what have we worn out?” In the saying of them, “Everyone who is doing evil—good in the eyes of Jehovah and in them He Himself is in favor,” or, “where is the God of the judgment?”

¹ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, Volume 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Associated Publishers and Authors, Inc.) p. 1531.

² All Hebrew quotations are from *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: With Westminster Hebrew Morphology*, 1996, c 1925; morphology c 1991. German Bible Society; Westminster Seminary; Stuttgart; Glenside, PA; Logos Research Systems, Inc. (Bellingham, WA).

NKJV

*You have wearied the LORD with your words; / Yet you say,
 “In what way have we wearied Him?” /In that you say,
 “Everyone who does evil / Is good in the sight of the LORD,
 And He delights in them,” / Or, “Where is the God of justice?”*

Vocabulary/Grammar

הוֹנֵעֶתֶם— **Hiphil perfect 2nd masculine plural:** 1) To labor, especially with effort and become weary; 2) to be fatigued, wearied out, to weary someone, to be wearisome to someone, followed by an accusative of the person and **כִּי** of the thing.

וְאָמַרְתֶּם— **Qal perfect 2nd masculine plural:** To say, speak.

הוֹנֵעֶנּוּ— **Qal perfect 2nd masculine plural:** 1) To labor, especially with effort and become weary; 2) to be fatigued, wearied out.

הִקְפִּיךָ— **Qal perfect 2nd masculine singular:** 1) To bend 2) to incline, be favorable toward a) to do something to will or desire b) toward someone, i.e. to favor him, to delight in him as in God, in men; to love someone, followed by **כִּי**.

“And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation’” (Exodus 34:6-7).

The LORD is indeed merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth—but even His patience was being strained by the words of His wayward people.

If there is one word that leaps off the page, it is **הוֹנֵעֶתֶם**.

The LORD of hosts, who neither slumbers nor sleeps (Psalm 121:2,4), who neither faints nor is weary (Isaiah 40:28, the same root verb is used) is worn out, wearied, tired out by the words of his unfaithful people.³

³ A similar sentiment is expressed in Isaiah 43:22-24, where it is revealed that Israel is *weary* of calling on the LORD (the weak are tired of calling on the strong?), whom they have wearied with their iniquities.

Why is the LORD wearied? He is wearied because His unfaithful people are calling what is evil, “good.” *“Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!”* (Isaiah 5:20).

It appears that some were going so far as to attempt to justify their sinful deeds by suggesting that the LORD delighted in them. Sounds much like some today who try to absolve themselves and quiet the conscience by saying things such as, “I can’t help it, God made me this way!” “God wants me to be happy, doesn’t He?”

Still worse, others seemed to be inviting the LORD’s judgment, talking like scoffers: “Where is the God of judgment?” “If what we are doing is wrong, then why doesn’t God judge us? Where is He?” This all sounds similar to the tone of the scoffers foretold by Peter in his second epistle (2 Peter 3:3-4): *“Scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.’”*

Even as some were scoffing at the visitation of the LORD for judgment then, so today scoffers snort at Christ’s coming again in glory. But God is faithful. He who promised in time past to send the Christ has also chosen the day (Matthew 24:36) in which Christ will return to judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31).

Those who were unfaithful to the LORD doubted that He would visit them. They asked: “Where is the God of judgment?” The LORD Himself is about to answer their wearying question—the God of judgment was about to come suddenly to His temple.

Malachi 3:1

הַנְּנִי שְׁלַח מַלְאָכִי וּפְנֵה דֶרֶךְ לְפָנָי וּפְתָאם יְבוֹא
 אֶל־הֵיכְלוֹ הָאֵדוֹן אֲשֶׁר־אַתֶּם מְבַקְשִׁים וּמִלְאָד הַבְּרִית
 אֲשֶׁר־אַתֶּם חֹפְצִים הִנֵּה־בָא אָמַר יְהוָה זְבָאוֹת:

Literal Translation

“Behold I myself will send My messenger and he shall prepare the way before My face and suddenly He shall come to His temple, the Lord which you (pl.) are seeking and the Messenger of the covenant which you (pl.) delight. Behold He is coming,” He says Jehovah of hosts.

NKJV

*“Behold, I send My messenger, / And he will prepare the way before Me.
And the Lord, whom you seek, / Will suddenly come to His temple,
Even the Messenger of the covenant, / In whom you delight.
Behold, He is coming, / Says the LORD of hosts.”*

Vocabulary/Grammar

הִנְנִי—**Particle, interjection with 1st singular suffix:** Lo! Behold! Here! Here!

וּפָנָה—**Piel perfect 3rd masculine singular:** “cause to depart,” hence, remove or take out of the way; to clear the way, to prepare.

מְבַקְשִׁים—**Piel participle masculine singular:** to seek for, strive after.

If we wanted someone to notice something important, we might say to him, “Hey! Look at this!” Here the interjection **הִנְנִי**, translated “behold,” is surely meant to do the same. There are two important things to be considered. The word **הִנְנִי** is also repeated later in the verse (without the suffix) to confirm that what has been said will surely come to pass.

After getting our attention, the LORD of hosts promises (the added pronoun makes it emphatic), “I myself will send My messenger to prepare the way before Me.” Keil and Delitzsch add this note: “[I]t was because the priests did not fulfill their duty as the ordinary ambassadors of God that the Lord was about to send an extraordinary messenger.”⁴

Who is this messenger of Jehovah? While the name *Malachi* means “my messenger,” and this word was given to him to speak, Malachi is not the messenger of Jehovah referred to by these words. Rather, as the last chapter of this book foretells (Malachi 4:5-6, “one like Elijah”) and the New Testament clarifies (Matthew 17:10-13), the LORD is speaking of the one also foretold by Isaiah. The coming messenger is the voice crying in the wilderness who came dressed in camel’s hair and preaching repentance and faith in the coming Christ (Isaiah 40:3-5).

Jehovah promised that first “My messenger” would come and prepare the way before Him. The Lord Jesus Himself would later speak of this very thing.

As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses.

⁴ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, p. 1532.

But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.' Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (Matthew 11:7-15; see also Mark 1:1-3, Luke 1:76, 7:27).

But there is more than one promise and more than one messenger coming. The first messenger was to prepare the way for the second, the very Messenger of the covenant. Thus in the midst of Malachi's burden comes the news that the people of God had been awaiting for thousands of years: The LORD of hosts also promised that the Messenger of the covenant would suddenly come to His temple.

Who is this Messenger of the covenant? He is the LORD Himself. "The identity of the angel of the covenant with the 'Lord' is placed beyond the reach of doubt by the parallelism of the clauses, and the notion is thereby refuted that the 'covenant angel' is identical with the person previously mentioned."⁵

God established the first covenant through Moses. But God also promised through the prophet Jeremiah to establish a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34) in which He would forgive their iniquities and remember their sins no more. Who is the Messenger who would come and establish this new covenant? It is the Lord Jesus Christ, as the epistle to the Hebrews bears witness.

But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. . . . And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance (Hebrews 9:11-12,15; see also Hebrews 8:7-13, 12:24).

⁵ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, p. 1534.

Thus when the time was right (Galatians 4:4-5), the Messenger of the covenant, the Son of God made flesh, came suddenly to His temple. “‘The Lord’ . . . is God; this is evident both from the fact that He comes to *His* Temple, i.e. the temple of Jehovah, and also from the relative clause ‘whom ye seek,’ which points back to the question, ‘Where is the God of judgment?’ (ch. ii. 17.)”⁶

Despite this prophecy, who was there waiting for His arrival (John 1:10-14)? There were only a few—for example, Simeon (Luke 2:25-35), Anna (Luke 2:36-38)—but their joy was full!

We still rejoice at His first coming in mercy and look forward with joy to His second coming. This is the case because we have been led by the Spirit to confess our sins and to trust in Christ for forgiveness. He is our advocate, our Savior, and our Lord.

But for those who have been unfaithful to the LORD and have forsaken Him, the prospect of His coming is, and will forever be, one of fear and terror.

Malachi 3:2

וּמִי מְכַלֵּל אֶת־יָוִם בּוֹאוֹ וּמִי הָעֹמֵד בְּהִרְאוֹתָיו כִּי־הוּא
כָּאֵשׁ מְצַרֵּף וּכְבֹרֵית מְכַבְּסִים:

Literal Translation

and who is enduring the day of His coming and who is standing in his appearing? Because He like a fire goldsmith, and like soap from one who cleanses.

NKJV

“But who can endure the day of His coming?

And who can stand when He appears?

For He is like a refiner’s fire /And like launderers’ soap.

Vocabulary/Grammar

וּמִי— **Interrogative pronoun:** Who? What?

מְכַלֵּל—**Piel participle singular masculine singular:** To measure, to take in, hold, contain; to hold up, sustain; to bear, endure.

הָעֹמֵד—**Qal participle masculine singular:** To stand, to stand before a king.

⁶C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, p. 1532.

בִּהְרָאוֹתָו—**Niphal infinitive construct with 3rd masculine suffix:** 1) To be seen 2) to let oneself be seen, to appear, used of persons, followed by **אֶל**. It is often used of Jehovah, or an angel, who appears.

מִזְרַךְ—**Piel participle masculine singular:** Properly, the word means to melt, but the participle is used of a goldsmith, a person who melts.

וּכְבֵּרִית—**Noun:** Properly, something that cleanses or has a cleansing property, especially salt or alkali, very often translated ‘soap.’

מְכַבְּסִים—**Piel participle masculine singular:** Properly, to tread or trample with the feet, hence to wash garments by treading them under water, but the participle is used of a washer of garments or a fuller.

The idea of God’s visitation or appearing for judgment is one found in a number of places in the Scripture. It is described as a great and fearful day for sinners who will not be able to endure His wrath over sin.

But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth will tremble, And the nations will not be able to endure His indignation (Jeremiah 10:10).

The LORD gives voice before His army, For His camp is very great; For strong is the One who executes His word. For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; Who can endure it? (Joel 2:11).

Who can stand before His indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, And the rocks are thrown down by Him (Nahum 1:6).

Why is His coming so terrible? Because He is like the intense fire a refiner uses to burn the impurities from metals. He comes to consume sin and its consequences. In the next chapter of Malachi, the day of the LORD is described in this way: *“For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,” Says the LORD of hosts, “That will leave them neither root nor branch”* (Malachi 4:1).

The LORD of hosts is also like a cleansing soap that removes every stain.

The coming of the LORD would forever be a day of terror for sinners were it not for Christ, and the revelation of what He accomplished when He came with mercy for sinners.

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet

perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation (Romans 5:6-11).

We have been reconciled to God through the death of His Son, and therefore the prospect of His coming holds no terror. But for those without faith in Christ, who remain in their sins, the coming of the LORD to judge is and should be a terrifying thought.

The Psalmist expresses both the fearful problem of sin and the solution when he says, *“If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, That You may be feared”* (Psalm 130:3-4).

There is forgiveness with the LORD, who comes to establish justice in the earth (Isaiah 42:4). He comes not only to judge but also to purify His people, enabling them also to bring forth God-pleasing fruits.

Malachi 3:3

וְיָשֵׁב מְצַרְרָף וּמְטַהֵר כֶּסֶף וְטָהַר אֶת־בְּנֵי־לְוִי וְזָקַק אֹתָם
כְּזָהָב וְכַכֶּסֶף וְהָיוּ לַיהוָה מִגִּישֵׁי מִנְחָה בַצְדָקָה:

Literal Translation

And He shall sit for a goldsmith and for a purifier of silver. And He shall purify the sons of Levi and He shall refine them as gold and as silver, and they shall be to Jehovah, caused to bring forth a gift (singular) in righteousness.

NKJV

He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; /He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge [or refine] them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the LORD / An offering in righteousness.

Vocabulary/Grammar

וְיָשֵׁב—**Qal perfect 3rd masculine singular:** To sit, to sit down, often used of judges and kings who judge and rule from a seated position.

נִטְהַר—**Piel perfect 3rd masculine singular:** To shine or be bright; to become clean or pure. Piel: To purify or cleanse either physically or spiritually, to declare clean.

נִזְקַק—**Piel perfect 3rd masculine singular:** To tie fast or bind; to squeeze through a strainer, hence to refine, used both of wine and metals. Piel: To refine, to purify.

יָהָר—**Qal perfect 3rd masculine plural:** To be, to exist, to become.

מִגִּישִׁי—**Hiphil participle plural construct:** To draw near, approach, to come near. Hiphil: To cause to come near, to bring something.

When the LORD Himself appears, He will refine by purging of sin. When His priests, the sons of Levi, have been cleansed, then they will again bring forth gifts in righteousness. It is necessary that the LORD first purify His people before they may bring forth godly fruits. As to why the sons of Levi are named specifically, Keil/Delitzsch offers the following:

“Since they, the supporters and promoters of the religious life of the nation, were quite corrupt, the renovation of the national life must begin with their purification. . . . that they will attend to the offering of sacrifice in the proper state of heart.”⁷

This picture of the LORD first purifying His servants so that they may serve Him is one that is used elsewhere in Scripture. One can not help but think of the vision of Isaiah and these words:

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said:

*“Behold, this has touched your lips; / Your iniquity is taken away,
And your sin purged.” / Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying:
“Whom shall I send, / And who will go for Us?”
Then I said, “Here am I! Send me” (Isaiah 6:6-8).*

It is worthy to note that after he had been cleansed, Isaiah said, “Here am I! Send me.”

“The Lord desires a pure product. ‘You shall be holy because your God is holy’ is a theme played often in the Bible. We can not even be ninety-nine and a large fraction percent clean. But who can stand, if that is the case? Who can

⁷ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, p. 1535.

bring his offerings to his God knowing that he is completely 100% pure? The answer is: God's people can."⁸

God has purified us, cleansed us of all sins through faith in Christ Jesus. Even though we are still hindered by our sinful flesh on this side of Heaven, the Spirit of God creates in us the desire to serve Him (Philippians 2:13), to cry out, "Here am I! Send me."

We seek to serve Him in a godly manner. Praise God that He accepts our imperfect service because of Christ our Lord.

Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:4-5).

Malachi 3:4

וְעִרְבָה לַיהוָה מִנְחַת יְהוּדָה וִירוּשָׁלַם כִּימֵי עוֹלָם
וּכְשָׁנִים קִדְמֹנִיּוֹת:

Literal Translation

And it shall be pleasant to Jehovah a gift of Judah and Jerusalem as in days long past and as in years former.

NKJV

*Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem
Will be pleasant [or pleasing] to the LORD,
As in the days of old, / As in former years.*

Vocabulary/Grammar

וְעִרְבָה—**Qal perfect 3rd feminine singular**: To mix, to weave, to exchange, to barter, to become surety, to pledge, to be sweet or pleasant (well mixed) followed by ל of pers., e.g. sleep, sacrifices, gifts.

מִנְחָה—**Noun feminine singular construct**: A gift, a tribute, a sacrifice.

עוֹלָם—**Noun masculine singular**: Properly, what is hidden, hidden time, eternity, of time long past, from a long time ago.

קִדְמֹנִיּוֹת—**Adjective feminine plural**: In front, anterior, oriental, eastern, old, ancient, former.

⁸Eric S. Hartzell, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, People's Bible Commentary (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House) p. 142.

After having been purified by the LORD, the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem would again be pleasing to the LORD as in former years.

What is meant by “former years”? Names and dates are not mentioned, but the term refers to those former years when the people and their priests were faithful to the Lord. Keil/Delitzsch offer possible eras:

“The days of the olden time and years of the past are the times of Moses, or the first years of the sojourn in the desert (Jer. ii:2), possibly also the times of David and of the first years of the reign of Solomon; whereas now, i.e. in the time of Malachi, the sacrifices of the nation were displeasing to God, not merely on account of the sins of the people (ch. ii:13), but chiefly on account of the badness of the sacrificing priests (i:10, 13).”⁹

Malachi 3:5

וְקָרַבְתִּי אֵלֵיכֶם לְמַשְׁפָּט וְהָיִיתִי עַד מְמֹהֵר בְּמִכְשָׁפִים
וּבַמְנַאֲפִים וּבַנֹּשְׁבָעִים לְשֹׁקֵר וּבַעֲשָׂקֵי שְׂכָר־שָׂכִיר אֶלְמָנָה
וְיָתוּם וּמְטִי־גֵר וְלֹא יִרְאוּנִי אָמַר יְהוָה זְבָאוֹת:

Literal Translation

And I will draw near to them for judgment. I will be a witness hurrying on those practicing sorcery, and on those committing adultery, and on those who have sworn to lies and on those who are defrauding a hireling, widow, and an orphan, and those causing to be turned away a stranger, and they will not fear me, says Jehovah of hosts.

NKJV

*And I will come near you for judgment; / I will be a swift witness
Against sorcerers, / Against adulterers, / Against perjurers,
Against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans,
And against those who turn away an alien—
Because they do not fear Me,” / Says the LORD of hosts.*

Vocabulary/Grammar

וְקָרַבְתִּי—Qal perfect 1st singular: To approach, come near.

וְהָיִיתִי—Qal Perfect 1st singular: To be, to become.

⁹ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, p. 1536.

מְמַדֵּר – **Piel participle masculine singular**: To be quick or skillful. Piel: To hasten, to make haste, to quicken, to be prompt.

בְּמִכְשָׁפִים – **Piel participle masculine plural**: Properly, to pray or offer prayer or worship, but in Hebrew this is restricted to idols, thus the use of enchantment, and the participle is used of an enchanter, magician, or sorcerer.

וּבְמִנְאָפִים – **Piel participle masculine plural**: to commit adultery, used of both male and female

וּבְנִשְׁבָּעִים – **Niphal participle masculine plural**: to swear

לִשְׁקָר – **Noun masculine singular**: a lie, a liar, whatever deceives, defrauds, vanity

וּבְעֲשָׂוִי – **Qal participles plural construct**: to oppress, act towards, treat unjustly or violently; to defraud, to extort

שְׂכָר – **Noun masculine singular construct**: wages of

שְׂכִיר – **Adjective masculine singular**: hireling

וּמָטִי – **Hiphil participle plural masculine construct**: to stretch out, extend. Hiphil: to extend, to stretch out the hand; to expand; to incline; to turn, to turn away.

יִרְאוּנִי – **Qal perfect 3rd plural with 1st singular pronoun suffix**: to fear, to be afraid, to revere, to tremble.

The LORD would not only draw near to purify those who were repentant, but also to judge those who were not. He will be a swift witness against unrepentant sinners. Rather than speak generally of sin, the LORD through Malachi mentions sins that were prevalent in Judah and also in our day. Those who weary the LORD by claiming that He is unfair will see on the day of His coming a grand show of His justice.

Sorcerers—It is interesting that the root word means “to pray, to offer prayers or worship”—but the participle is used of proponents of false religions in Egypt and Babylon. Those who serve and worship idols will be judged by the One True God.

Adulterers—Those who commit sexual sin (used of both male and female) will also stand before the Judge, and unless they repent and trust in the Christ, they will be condemned. I am reminded of what a brother said in referring to the words of Hebrews 13:4, “Those who commit adultery put themselves in the crosshairs of God’s judgment.” Well said.

Perjurers—Literally “those who have sworn to lies.” I can not help but wonder how many people in our age take seriously placing their hands upon the Bible and promising, “I hereby solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God.” Do they consider that they are calling upon God to bear witness to the truth and punish the liar? The LORD God certainly warns about all swearing that is done dishonestly or thoughtlessly (Leviticus 19:12, James 5:12).

Swindlers—Those who defraud their employees and widows and orphans. Those who do not pay the fair wage agreed upon will have to answer to God. The cries of those defrauded in this manner reach the LORD of hosts (see James 5:1-5). It seems that hardly a day goes by without the news reports including some new scam aimed at the elderly and the unfortunate. None of these things go unnoticed by the just Judge of all who warns against defrauding one’s fellow man (Leviticus 19:13) and widows and orphans (Exodus 22:22).

Those who turn away an alien—Upon first reading, I read this as saying, “Don’t turn the foreigner away from the LORD.” However, it is more commonly understood as, “Don’t oppress a stranger unjustly.” Certainly, the action described by both of these is contrary to the will of God.

“Verse 5 closes this section by reminding God’s people that he is the God who judges those intent on covering up the truth with a lie . . . sorcerers in the field of religion, adulterers in human relationships, perjurers in courts. He also is the God of the underdog championing the cause of the defense-less: the laborer, the widows, the fatherless, the aliens. He calls the wicked to justice because they do not fear him; and it is this very lack of fear that makes them bold to perpetrate their lies and their evil deeds. They will hear the verdict: contempt of court, contempt of the first commandment.”¹⁰

Malachi 3:6

כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה לֹא שֹׁנֵיתִי וְאַתֶּם בְּנֵי-יַעֲקֹב לֹא כִלְיִתֶם:

Literal Translation

For I Jehovah, I do not change and you (pl.) sons of Jacob you are not destroyed.”

NKJV

*“For I am the LORD, I do not change;
Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.”*

¹⁰ Eric S. Hartzell, p. 142.

Vocabulary/Grammar

שָׁנִיתִי – Qal perfect 1st singular: The root שָׁנָה means 1) to repeat, to do the same time and again; 2) to be different from; 3) to alter, change, be changed, changeable, given to change.¹¹

כָּלֵיתָם – Qal perfect 2nd masculine plural: To be completed, finished, to be past, gone by; to be consumed, spent, to be wasted, destroyed, perish

It is because the LORD does not change that neither does His mercy and love. So it is also written in Lamentations, ***“Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not”*** (Lamentations 3:22).

It is the LORD’s mercy that sent Malachi to a wayward people. It is His mercy that sent John to prepare the hearts of the people for the Christ. It is His mercy that sent His Son to make atonement for our sins. Praise God that He is the God of mercy who does not change!



¹¹ Benjamin Davidson, The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons Ltd., 2nd edition, 1850).

Youth, Truth, and Postmodernism

David L. W. Pfeiffer

It is one of those conversations that leaves a parent confused, frustrated, and uncertain. A son has just finished his third year of college and has come home to visit for the summer. It has been over a year since he last went to church with the family, and tomorrow is Sunday. Mom and Dad begin to wonder if he will go. The family sits down to a nice dinner and begins to talk about school, friends, and what the collegiate has learned. The parents soon find out that he has a girlfriend. They also learn that he has been living with her for the better portion of the second semester. They know they should be shocked, but somehow they are not.

The parents ask their son if he will be going to church with them the next day. He replies, "I don't think so." Mom and Dad do not know what to say. They ask him whether church matters to him anymore. But he just responds with a blank stare and says, "Why?" Dad finds himself frustrated, but he does not know how to answer this question. So he decides to get up abruptly from the table and emphatically tells his son to clear off the table and then adds, "We're leaving at 8:30."

These are the conversations that leave parents befuddled. Their son is asking questions they are not prepared to answer. He knows it is wrong to move in with his girlfriend. He knows they always go to church on Sundays. He knows what he learned in Sunday School. But he is just not convinced that he can really trust what he has been taught. He has a million choices in front of him with a million voices telling him different stories about life and truth. He has no real idea how to make sense of it all. It is a mess. It is chaotic. There are questions he does not know how to answer. So he goes with what is familiar, what appeals to him.

Pontius Pilate found himself confronted with similar questions for which he had no answer. There he stood in the Roman judgment hall, face to face with the truth. Jesus stood before him, accused by His fellow Jews of claiming to be a king. The governor asked Him whether it was true. *"Are You the King of the Jews?" he asked. Jesus' response confronted Pilate with the truth, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight . . . but now My kingdom is not from here. . . . For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice"* (John 18:33,36,37).

Pilate was confronted by the most important question, “Who is Jesus?” But even as he is convicted by Jesus’ very words, Pilate can not understand them. He is of the world, and he wants to rule according to this world. This question of truth and this question of Jesus’ kingship is a foolish discussion. It cannot be known. So he breaks off this conversation abruptly, “*What is truth?*” (John 18:38).

What is truth? Why does it matter? Let us sit down at that dinner table and stand in Pilate’s judgment hall to take part in this conversation. As we do so, we will begin with the historical and cultural shift that has taken place over the last few centuries from Modernism to Postmodernism and how this has shaped the way many think about truth. Secondly, we will examine how this shift has impacted our culture and churches. Thirdly, we will survey the spiritual lives and religious practices of American youth. Fourthly, we will get to the question of why knowing truth matters for our lives. Finally, we will draw conclusions about truth as a matter of faith and conviction for witnesses of Jesus Christ and His resurrection.

Our goal is to keep the voice of Christ involved in the ongoing conversation between the culture and the next generation of American youth. As we stand against the works of Satan, we hope to equip the next generation of Christians to carry on the cause of Christ, that they might learn to bear witness to the truth with Christ before the world.

The Enlightenment and Modernism

“For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.” When Sir Isaac Newton codified this Third Law of Motion, he was speaking of the physical world. He could little have imagined the analogous reaction that would take place 200 years later in the realm of ideas. Years after Newton’s death, there was, more or less, an equal and opposite reaction. A new way of thinking known as *Postmodernism* would come as a reaction to the old way of thinking known as *Modernism*.

Isaac Newton may be said to typify the modern mindset. Francis Schaeffer asserts that when Newton wrote *The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* in 1687, he was introducing “one of the most influential books in the history of human thought.”¹ Along with the works of thinkers like Descartes and Voltaire, Newton’s scientific, rational, evidence-based approach to truth would shape the world of philosophy, religion, and science for centuries to come.

¹Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?: The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture*, p. 135.

For these men—whether the issue was philosophical, scientific, or political—truth was knowable, and the same truth that is knowable by the individual is knowable for all. In this sense, truth was said to be *objective*—it is outside of oneself—and it is certain. Truth was likewise universal, applying equally to all people at all times.

Schaeffer argues that “[N]on-Christian philosophers from the time of the Greeks until just before our modern period had three things in common.”

1. They were rationalists. Man from within himself can reach a universal knowledge outside of himself, including knowledge of God.
2. They accepted the validity of reason, meaning they relied on logic. Certain things are true and others not true, certain things are right and others wrong.
3. They were optimistic; that is, each human being has within himself the potential to find answers to the problems of life. Together, humankind has the potential to agree on a unified truth to explain reality and accomplish what is good for all.²

This worldview was the prevailing framework for the practice of philosophy, science, and religion.

So momentum was given to a movement known as *The Enlightenment* that began roughly in the late 1600’s. This movement swept across western Europe and even found its way across the sea into the thinking of American Revolutionists. The goal of “the Enlightenment Project” was to bring the world into the freedom of individual reasoning and an enlightened knowledge that was not dependent on authorities such as the government or the church.

Philosophers and revolutionists alike imagined and reasoned how an enlightened society would come to be. This imagination took shape as the American colonists struggled toward independence. The framework of this mindset was characterized by a belief in a generic creator, the ability to discover universal laws, the value of rational thought, the reliability of observational and empirical science, and the potential of humankind to achieve a higher good for the world.

As the Enlightenment began to crest at the time of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), more and more people were drawn inward in their search for truth. Reason and society began to take the place of God and the Bible. The Age of Modernity had begun and would stretch into the 20th century.

² Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?*, p. 145.

This time period was marked by a “counter enlightenment” that began to take shape. Reason and science ruled, and God was pushed to the edges, having no real interaction with the world that He once created. This philosophical worldview is known as *Modernism*. “In the modern period, human reason would take the place of God, solving all human problems and remaking society along the lines of scientific, rational truth.”³ This is where Modernism would clash with Postmodernism most starkly.⁴

Postmodernism is a reaction against the rational, objective, evidence-based approach of modernism. Postmodernism rejects the assumptions of modernism. The postmodernist will argue that truth is not universally knowable, and every individual is a product of his environment.

Modernism and Postmodernism

For something to be objective it needs to stand on its own and be unaffected by what changes around it. Drawing from the work of the late 17th century philosopher John Locke, consider an illustration about reality and perception. Suppose you and a friend have three buckets of water: on the left, a bucket of water that has been chilled by ice; on the right, a bucket that has been heated to a nearly scalding temperature; and in the middle, a bucket that has been filled with room-temperature water. Your friend reaches his hand into the hot water and you plunge your hand into the ice cold water. Then you both place your hands in the lukewarm water. You reach your cold hand into the lukewarm water and say, “That water is warm!” Your friend reaches his warm hand into the lukewarm water and says, “No, it is cold.” So, in reality, is the middle bucket warm or cold?⁵

Now, the modernist might say, “The water is 70 degrees,” but for a postmodernist, that sort of objective truth is nothing more than an illusion. A postmodernist will argue that 70 degrees is meaningless. It does not matter what you label the water if you can not experience it. To the cold hand, the water is warm. To the warm hand, the water is cold. And for the postmodernist that is all we can know. Thus all reality becomes a matter

³ Veith, Gene Edward Veith, *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture*, p. 27.

⁴ To learn more, see Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?*, p. 120ff.

⁵ Stanley Grenz, in his *Primer on Postmodernism*, uses the character Spock from TV’s *Star Trek*, with his “dispassionate knowledge,” to illustrate the modern man. The character Neo, from *The Matrix*, who finds that his world is a world of illusion, a computer simulation, exemplifies postmodernism.

perception. There is nothing more for you to know than how the water feels to you. A modernist might attempt to measure the temperature, but once you have placed your hand in the water, that measurement means something different for one person than it does for another. We have been robbed of the ability to know reality objectively. There is only the individual's perception of truth, morality, God. In this line of thinking there are no absolutes. There is nothing that is universal. All truth is subjective. Whereas Rene Descartes said, "I think, therefore I am," the postmodernist says "I think, therefore I think I am . . . but I can't really know for sure."⁶

Professor J. P. Meyer points out in his book *The Kingdom of Christ* that even the most basic fundamental conclusion based on observation is thrown into question by the theory of relativity. If the world has failed to agree in even the small questions, how much more will it be hopelessly lost when it comes to the one great question, the question of God.

Consider an example: A driver in his car approaches a traffic light, and the modernist in the passenger seat says, "The light is red, you should stop." In doing this he is asserting an objective, moral demand. It is a claim to truth that applies not only to him but also to you, the driver. As Christians, we would agree that the driver should stop because it is against the law to run the red light. But for the postmodernist, such an argument about "right" and "wrong" is not as important as "what is best." The postmodern man is not interested in whether or not a claim is true; instead he wants to know, "How does that claim affect me? What does it accomplish?" He might agree that the driver should stop, but the basis for that assertion would be different. There would be no appeal to a natural or moral law. Instead, his answer will be best described as *pragmatic*.

A pragmatic approach to a problem or question simply seeks to know what will work best in the situation. It is not a matter of right or wrong, but a matter of practicality. The pragmatic postmodern driver will answer, "I agree, I should stop, so that I don't risk getting a ticket." Or he might say, "I will stop because otherwise I risk crashing and hurting myself and others." Why it would be bad to hurt someone else, he cannot say, but that is not as important as the feeling

⁶This was Immanuel Kant's illusionary "Ding an sich" (the thing itself). Kant asserted that you can't know the true nature of a thing. You know only that it exists. Science, for Kant, can only lead us to the thing as it appears to us, but not as it is in itself. There is then, no objective knowledge; only the idea that it exists. So the likes of Kierkegaard and his existential theology would follow. Nothing beyond the experience matters, for objectivity is not attainable. (see <http://www.iep.utm.edu/objectiv/#SH2a>)

that it would not be a good decision. Reason and rational argument have been replaced by feelings and the doctrine of tolerance. Pragmatism makes room in the conscience for the devil to set up his workshop.

For the postmodernist, all truth is subjective. This means that the passenger in the car would say, "I can't say that you should stop. That's your choice." Secondly, truth is experienced rather than known. This is why the driver would say, "I stopped because I didn't want to get in an accident and hurt someone." If it feels wrong, he won't do it. If it feels right, he might. For the postmodernist, truth also is imminent, meaning it is not timeless. If you were to ask him what he will do next time, he would respond, "I can't say. I might be late for work or something. As long as I am careful to look both ways, and no other cars are coming, and as long as there are no police around, I might decide to go next time."

Postmodernism has replaced reason with feelings and impulse. Pragmatism is what matters. Think of what this does to issues of faith and religion. This is why we hear statements such as, "Jesus works for you, Buddha works for me, and things work just fine for both of us."

This is not to say that modernism is a better solution. After all, it was modernism which produced the pietistic inward focus of faith. It was modernism which put man in authority over Scripture in the form of the historical-critical method. It was modernism which promoted rationalism and began dismissing the possibility of miracles, angels, and even the resurrection. The more people turned to themselves as the ultimate authority on truth, the more God was no longer needed. As Gene Veith puts it in his book *Postmodern Times*, "In the modern period, human reason would take the place of God, solving all human problems and remaking society along the lines of scientific, rational truth."⁷

Postmodernism began as a reaction against the rationalistic approach to religion and philosophy. Yet, while turning away from reason, postmodernism has turned itself inward again, now looking to feelings to decide what is true. These are the "*cunning plots*" of men (Ephesians 4:14) that surround us and the "*snare of the devil that would take us captive to do his will*" (2 Timothy 2:26). Can we identify these deceptions when they appear on our TV screens, in our schools, in our families, in our churches?

⁷ Veith, *Postmodern Times*, p. 27

Postmodernism in the Culture and in the Church

Veith compares the shift taking place between modernism and postmodernism to the events that took place at the tower of Babel (Genesis 11). At Babel we find a grand project. We find a world united in one common vision. The people have one language and one goal: to build the greatest monument the world has ever seen and make a name for themselves. The LORD sees what is happening. The people of Babel no longer see any need for God. The city they are building will do quite fine without Him. So He confuses them. He confuses their languages so that they can no longer make sense of their project. He divides them among the nations of the earth and scatters them abroad.

One of the primary characteristics of Postmodernism is a fractured society. The Enlightenment Project envisioned a unified people—a world where there is one language and one common goal. It was a time that was filled with optimism and progression toward a better, more affluent, enlightened society. But now the language of modernism has been confused.

With its truth as an unknowable ideal transfused into a relative opinion, the enlightenment project has failed to bring about a better, more unified world; and the people have been scattered into a collage of different communities. Progress is no longer about a common vision that will send a man to the moon; now progress is all about diversity. Toleration is no longer about allowing the existence of beliefs with which you disagree; now toleration means accepting other beliefs as equally valid.⁸

Religion is not about knowing what is right for the world, but it is about feeling what is right for you. The language of modernism has been confused and the people have been scattered—each speaking his own truth and each knowing only his own story. As a result, we are left with a collage of images without a unifying theme.

Negative Communities

Philip Rieff captures the results of this epidemic in what he has termed “negative communities.” Rieff was a professor of sociology and theorist at the University of Pennsylvania and spent much of his life researching the work of Sigmund Freud. Philip Manning posits that Rieff captured the dilemma of Postmodernism in what he identifies as the difference between a “positive community” and a “negative community.”

⁸ A good book on this particular issue is D.A. Carson's *The Intolerance of Tolerance*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2012).

Rieff refers to a positive community as the sort of belief system (not strictly theological) which promises some form of salvation. A positive community offers some greater value to the individual by participation in the vision and within the boundaries of the community.

These are the sorts of communities which call for conviction, commitment, and duty. At one time, churches were largely seen as this sort of community, but not so much anymore. This is because from a postmodernist's point of view, the promise is merely fiction—this truth of good is an illusion which can never be realized. For the postmodernist, it is impossible to simply promise a greater outcome, because one is always captive to his circumstance. There is no unified story that applies to the whole.

The “negative community” is a community marked by “a dissolution of a unitary system of common belief.”⁹ It is a fractured community living in a culture which has lost two important things. It has lost both the moral command, “Thou shalt not,” and the will to care about why the command matters. That is to say, it has rejected the possibility of some unified and objective good. It is negative in that it is interested only in getting and consuming, but sees no value in giving and sacrificing. To quote Manning, “This culture produces a relativist, permissive culture, a version of the cult of the individual, alienation, consumerism and indifference to tradition. . . . Whereas positive communities try to transform individuals, negative communities only inform them. As a result there is no prospect of salvation. What is left is merely therapy.”¹⁰

Rieff draws from the work of Sigmund Freud. Already in the late 19th century, Freud had identified the cultural shift that was taking place. He called it “an epistemic break” and said that “the drifting experience of this break will continue because there is nothing to replace it.”¹¹ In other words, these “negative communities” offer no hope for a better future. Instead they drift onward by impulse. Freud identified the postmodern “threat of meaninglessness” by suggesting that “life’s contradictions cannot be resolved.” Because these contradictions of competing values cannot be resolved, the goal is then not to be deceived. “Moral virtue amounts to being able to say that one has not been taken in.”¹²

⁹ Philip Manning, “Philip Rieff’s Moral Vision of Sociology: From Positive to Negative Communities—and Back?” *Journal of Classical Sociology / J Classical Sociol* 3.3 (2003), p. 241.

¹⁰ Manning, Philip Rieff’s Moral Vision of Sociology, pp. 25, 240. ¹¹ Manning, Philip Rieff’s Moral Vision of Sociology, p. 241. ¹² Manning, Philip Rieff’s Moral Vision of Sociology, p. 242.

This is where Freud offers his solution—a solution which would permeate the world of psychology and poison the thinking of postmodern Christianity for years to come. Freud's answer was *therapy*. In his words, the goal should be “to survive, resign yourself to living within your moral means, suffer no gratuitous failures in a futile search for ethical heights that no longer exist—if they ever did.”¹³

Sadly this is what we see around us, both in the culture and in many churches: the triumph of the therapeutic. If subjective thoughts, feelings, and experiences are all that are left to govern us, then finding some way to cope with our feelings is the way to go. This can be found in certain methods of victim counseling designed to make the problem go somewhere else, and in medicine designed to mask the real issue. This therapy could also show itself in the form of narcotics and alcohol which numb the sense of meaninglessness. It could be that a person simply becomes engrossed with work and food and play and doesn't bother to take the time to think about God at all for fear of what might happen. How else can we manage our conflicting thoughts? How else can we cope with the loss of hope that postmodernism presents? How else can we distract ourselves from ourselves?

A postmodern culture has no sense of God's greater story. The idea of asserting belief in a Creator, Redeemer, and Judge is so far beyond the scope of what is knowable, that it becomes empty and void of real substance. We might say it is real, but is it real? Instead, postmodernism lives only in the moment. It lives only in the small story—each story different, each having its own perspective on the world. Such a therapy of the moment is spelled out in the culture all around us. It is in television shows we watch such as *Seinfeld*—a show about nothing. It is seen in the consumer-driven advertising that shouts at us in pictures. It is experienced in what the sociologist Thorstein Veblen termed “conspicuous consumption.” It is heard in the villages of Israel, when God called for weeping and mourning, and they responded with the oxen and wine saying, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (e.g. Isaiah 22:12-13).

A Fractured Church

This fracturing has impacted not only the culture, but also the church. The *visible* church is as much fractured as the world is. So much of Christianity assumes truth to be a purely subjective idea, leaving each community of Christians to hold its own assortment of views and theological opinions. What

¹³ Manning, Philip Rieff's Moral Vision of Sociology, p. 242

is left is a collage of competing claims to truth, each allowed to stand alongside the other with equal validity. Already in 1914, Professor John Schaller wrote about this issue in the *Theologische Quartalschrift*.

[T]he world maliciously charges Christians that the clash of opinions among theologians, which has split them into countless parties, must prove the inadequacy of the Christian religion. . . . [M]odern theology is completely saturated with the view that every presentation of Christian truth reflects the subjective interpretation of the individual, and therefore can not claim objective validity. . . . [I]t is considered fashionable to let everyone think, speak, and maintain his fancy without deservedly putting him in his place with moral indignation. . . . Since the modern theology claims to seek the truth but not to have it, the man outside the church can come to but one assumption: also for the Christian it is impossible to know and have the truth.¹⁴

A study done by Gallup shows the trend. Over the course of fifty years, Americans were asked the question, "Is pre-marital sex wrong?" In 1969 only 68% of Americans believed it was wrong. In 1987 that number was down to 46%. By 2001, only 38% still believed pre-marital sex was wrong.¹⁵ Similarly, in a study done by the Barna Group in 2002, teens were offered six different approaches to moral and ethical decision making. Nearly four out of ten teenagers said they base their moral decisions on "what feels right or comfortable in a situation."¹⁶

This feeling-based, therapeutic approach to theology has opened the door for a new form of authority in the church that is no longer drawn from Scripture. Ministry has become a competition for power. Whose methods will bring in the people? What will it take to get them in the pews or theater chairs? Who can maintain the majority view? Postmodern philosophy has been predicting this for years. Michel Foucault, an influential French postmodern philosopher, taught that every interpretation of reality is an assertion of power.

¹⁴ John Schaller, "Der Besitz der Wahrheit" (The Possession of the Truth), *Theologische Quartalschrift* XI (19:14): pp. 209-213. Translated by Henry C. Nitz (www.wlssays.net)

¹⁵ <http://news.gallup.com/poll/8704/current-views-premarital-extramartial-sex.aspx>

¹⁶ <https://www.barna.com/research/americans-are-most-likely-to-base-truth-on-feelings/>

In other words, if all things are subjective, then assertions of truth are merely assertions of power. Because there is no appeal to an objectivity or a universal power that governs and orders the world, we are left struggling to assert our own persuasions. Whoever can hold the majority view becomes the one who wins. Whoever can offer the greatest appeal to what feels best to the world, will conquer the world.

The popular author and mega church consultant, Rick Warren, resuscitated the phrase “Deeds, not creeds.” This phrase was first coined by the Unitarian Universalists in the early 20th century and has since been adopted as its own sort of basic creed in many churches today. What you do is more important than what truth you believe. Addressing the Pew Forum’s biannual Faith Angle conference in 2005, Warren said,

You know, 500 years ago, the first Reformation with Luther and then Calvin, was about beliefs. I think a new reformation is going to be about behavior. The first Reformation was about creeds; I think this one will be about deeds. I think the first one was about what the church believes; I think this one will be about what the church does.¹⁷

Rick Warren is among a growing network of leaders in evangelical Christianity who associate themselves, at times openly, with a subjective, postmodern approach to theology. In this movement, the matter of interpretation is purely subjective. There is no absolute truth of Scripture. Rather, there is just your perspective, and every individual is different. This is how any deeper conversation about God’s Word is abruptly killed with the statement, “Well, that’s just your interpretation.”

Postmodernism engages in something known as “language deconstruction.”¹⁸ Language provides structures of meaning which make sense out of our lives and our existence. Deconstructionism argues that meaning is something we create. Since each person is captive to his own perspective, to read a text is to create your own meaning. What the author originally intended when he wrote the piece is not the same as what it means when it is read. The small group, youth group, or Bible study leader begins deconstructing a Bible

¹⁷ Transcript from Pew Forum on Religion, Politics, and Public Life, 2005; <http://www.pewforum.org/2005/05/23/myths-of-the-modern-megachurch/>

¹⁸ Veith, *Postmodern Times*, pp. 51ff

passage as he looks around the room and asks, “Now, what does that passage mean to you?”¹⁹

Stanley Grenz describes postmodern philosophy as follows:

Meaning is not inherent in a text itself. Meaning emerges only as the interpreter enters into dialogue with the text. And because the meaning of a text is dependent on the perspective of the one who enters into dialogue with it, it has as many meanings as it has readers.²⁰

With this relativistic approach to Scripture, the authority no longer resides in the Spirit’s intent and inspiration of the text. Rather, the authority now resides with the reader. This is an illustration of Foucault’s assertions of power. Because the Word of God does not objectively hold together the beliefs of the church, the faith now is driven by claims to power. Who can captivate the majority?

The result of all this in the church is Christians with little to no conviction about what they believe. Instead, churches are held under the sway of their leadership. More and more this claim to power over the church is asserted in the form of direct revelation. We hear of prophets and visions and the Spirit’s mystical workings in the hearts of church leadership.²¹ What matters is not the

¹⁹ In a July 13, 2007 article of the *Christian Post*, Rick Warren talks about the importance of Christian laughter. In support, he reaches into Scripture and rips out this passage: “One of my favorite verses in the Bible is Psalm 2:4, ‘The One enthroned in heaven laughs.’ Isn’t that a great verse? God has a sense of humor. God laughs! . . . Do you want to be more like God? Learn to laugh.” Sadly, the laughter of God in Psalm 2 is not a good thing. God is in fact laughing in mockery against those who imagine they can free themselves from His omnipotent rule. Context and authorial intent is something all but lost on a postmodernist reading. Ironically, the efforts to “stand against the Lord and His anointed” and to “break their bonds” are exactly what Rick Warren and other church growth leaders are trying to do.

²⁰ Grenz, Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 1996, p. 5 (emphasis added).

²¹ The exact terminology is “Vision Casting Leaders.” This refers to those pastors and church consultants who claim either explicitly or implicitly to receive direct revelation from God. The direction of ministry is derived from their “vision” for the congregation. This is basically the corporate model for successful business leadership which has been baptized into a mystical form of the Spirit’s calling. As internationally recognized children ministry consultant Jim Wideman puts it, “Start with discovering your vision. Pray, dream[,] and hear from God firsthand what He wants for the children’s ministry you lead. I love to be still before the Lord and imagine the possibilities and His desires for my ministry. Ask and you shall find [sic]. When I draw close to Him, He always draws close to me. Ask Him for a picture of the end result.” (<http://www.churchleaders.com/children/childrens-ministry-how-tos/169270-vision-casting-what-it-is-and-how-to-do-it.html>).

universal, unchanging truths of God's Word, but the doings of God's people. It is about deeds, not creeds.

The Seeker Driven Movement

Peter Drucker has been called "the Father of Modern Management." He was a consultant to General Motors during its years of formidable growth during the 1940's. He has written many popular books and articles on business management. Later in life, he turned his efforts away from business models to nonprofits. In an interview conducted by *Christianity Today* in 1989, Drucker states,

All nonprofits have one essential product: a changed human being. This is a different approach from business. In business, your goal is not to change the customer; it's not to educate the customer; it's to satisfy the customer. Whenever a business forgets that, it's in trouble. When GM tried to tell us what cars we ought to drive, we began to drive Toyotas.²²

This goal of "satisfying the customer" has given birth to the seeker driven movement led by megachurch organizations like Bill Hybels's Willow Creek or Rick Warren's Saddleback Community.²³ The postmodern emphasis on feelings means that feelings are the deciding factor and then anything that would potentially make people feel bad about themselves has to go. Crosses have to go. Talk of sin has to go. Any worship setting that would make an unbeliever uncomfortable or confused has to go, and whether followers are aware of it or not, Jesus and His Word have to go, too. The Seeker Driven Movement's aim is not to serve believers, but to satisfy unbelievers. In the words of Drucker,

On the supply side, more and more churches are what I call "pastoral churches." Their purpose is not to perpetuate a particular liturgy or maintain an existing institutional form. Instead, they're asking what my business friends would call the marketing question: "Who are the customers, and what's of value to them?" They're more interested in the pastoral question ("What do these people need that we can

²² <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/1989/spring/89I2014.html>

²³ An article in Forbes magazine identifies the connection between Peter Drucker, Bob Buford, and the megachurch boom of the 1980's. (<http://www.forbes.com/sites/richkarlgaard/2014/03/26/peter-drucker-and-me/#2955ca9e7697>). The article identifies some early disciples of Drucker as being two pastors of the largest megachurches in America, namely, Rick Warren of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California and Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Community Church in suburban Chicago. Buford and Drucker have been a personal consultants for these men since their early years.

supply?") than in the theological nuances ("How can we preserve our distinctive doctrines?").²⁴

What we see in the church landscape around us—from the absence of confessional churches to the subjective interpretations of Scripture to the numbers-hungry church leadership—is the symptomatic expressions of negative communities being formed within a postmodern society. These forms of therapy undermine the work of Christ.

God has not left us to create our own meanings of scriptural truth. Rather, He has poured out His Spirit of truth. Let us not forget how God brought back what was scattered at Babel. On Pentecost He reached out to all nations to give them a common language once again, and that language is the language of the gospel. It is the same news of sin and death, salvation and resurrection which is spoken to every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. God has given it to us in the same objective way: Word and sacrament.

The Spiritual Lives of American Youth

As one generation of faithful Christians is called to the Church Triumphant, how can we show the value and importance of God's Word to the next generation? How can we effectively pass the faith to the next generation of Christians in a meaningful and biblical way?

This is altogether a daunting task and one best left for God to work out in His Spirit as the body of Christ works together, each part doing its share. Nevertheless, we are able to provide a response for perceived concerns. Specifically, we ask the question, "What is going on in the minds and lives of young people ages eighteen to thirty years old as they emerge from childhood and seek to establish themselves as independent adults?"²⁵

In an interview, a young adult respondent was asked to explain how a person knows the difference between right and wrong. The response is revealing.

Morality is how I feel too, because in my heart, I could feel it. You could feel what's right and wrong in your heart as well as your mind. Most of the time, I always felt, I feel it in my heart, and it makes it easier for me to morally decide what's right and wrong.

Because if I feel about doing something, I'm going to feel it in my heart. And if it feels good, then I'm going to do it. But if it doesn't feel

²⁴ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/1989/spring/89I2014.html>

²⁵ What follows contains rather general sweeping statements based on a nation-wide survey of both the church and unchurched. Particular experiences and situations in each family and congregation will vary in unique ways.

good, I'm going to know. Because then I'm going to be nervous, and I'm going to be tensed, and it's not going to feel good. It's not going to feel right. So it's like I got that feeling as well as thinking.²⁶

The overwhelming use of phrases like "I feel" (12 times in this response) in addressing moral decisions reflects the postmodern emphasis that pervades our culture. The inability to rely on God's objective moral order forces individuals to turn within and to base their religious thoughts on their subjective experience of life. This is the postmodern current that is carrying us downstream, and the response of the majority is simply to "go with the flow."

The quote above comes from a ten-year sociological project conducted by the National Study of Youth and Religion and led by sociologist Christian Smith of Notre Dame University. The work began in 2004 with a random sampling of over three thousand teens (ages thirteen to seventeen) interviewed by phone and in person.

Most of the teenagers were re-interviewed in subsequent years. Four samples were gathered with the goal of tracking the religious trajectory of America's youth and identifying the cultural themes that influence them as they transition from teenage to adulthood. What follows is based on the results of this project as summarized in two books by Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious Lives of American Teenagers* and *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*.

Smith points out that the term *teenagers* is a relatively new idea brought on by mass education, child labor laws, urbanization, mass consumerism, and the media. Even newer is the term *emerging adult*. *Emerging adult* refers to what might be seen as the college phase of life. This is the time in which young people are no longer teenagers, yet not fully adults. They are no longer totally dependent, yet they are not completely settled. Sociologists have bracketed this phase as occurring between the ages of 18-29.

During this time, young people go through an amazing number of transitions, virtually simultaneously. They are faced with the challenge of establishing their own identity, independent from the identity of their parents, as they navigate in the ever-increasing speed of life. Smith identifies the following factors that have led to this extended period of instability and transition for young people.²⁷

²⁶ Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009, p. 51.

²⁷ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, p. 5.

First, a demand placed upon young adults to complete their higher education.

Secondly, marriage is commonly delayed to allow youth to explore life's many options. The median age of marriage for women went from 20.3 years in 1950 to 25.9 years in 2006. The median age for men also rose 4.7 years in the same time frame.

Thirdly, changes in the global economy have led to less attractive factory jobs, instability in the job market, frequent career changes, and the need for a variety of skills.

Finally, parental subsidy usually lasts well past the teenage years. The average parent spends \$38,340 per child between ages 18 and 34.

This time of transition is filled with change and uncertainty, but also with optimism and a carefree sense of possibility. The realm of possibilities and freedom leaves the emerging adult with an overwhelming number of options, yet no real boundaries to help foster commitments. It is a time of disorganized freedom.

In elementary school, the boundaries were set. Mom and Dad had every last minute of the day scheduled. They may have been deciding already what their little boy's interests would be, where he was going to go to college, and what he was going to become. In high school, the boundaries were a little looser, but not much. He was told what to do, where to be, and when to have it done. The bell rang, he handed in his report.

As an emerging adult, rather suddenly, he is let go, shoved out. Now he is in need of a place to live, wanting to find a job, told to pick a major, required to meet deadlines, asked to go to a party, questioned about sex, and so on. Somewhere in the background, the biggest choices of all are waiting—choices about the role of God and church in his life. But to him, they are not pressing issues; life is long, and right now there are other things about which to worry.

We might see this as the "collage of college." Reflecting the postmodern view of the world as a collage, the college-age experience is very much like a collage. Because the greater story of God has been chopped up into momentary experiences, impulses, and images, the emerging adult has little sense of how this phase in life fits into a bigger purpose or outcome that God is accomplishing in the world.

The college student is confronted with a collage of choices: career paths, new friends, differing beliefs. He is left at a loss to piece it all together into something meaningful. Compounded by the subjective religious assumptions

which are engendered in most young people, it becomes extremely difficult for the young person to know how to evaluate his own beliefs, how to judge the world in which he lives, or how to make commitments to life-outcome decisions that confront him. So the phase comes, it does what it does, and it goes. The college experience becomes at least a sort of wash and at most a means to an end. This is why emerging adults do not see themselves as adults yet. They are not yet ready to “settle down.”

Thematic Cultural and Religious World Views of Emerging Adults

Not ready to settle down. Adulthood is equated with a long-term career, financial stability, a house, reliable cars, spouse, family. College is considered a time for figuring things out and having some fun along the way. Settling down is for later. “I think people should have a career and good income before getting married. Maybe get a lot of stuff out of your system, like messing around with girls and stuff, or partying, get that out of your system. Get all that stuff out of your system before you get married. Once you get married, you won’t be able to do all that stuff.”²⁸

No regrets, a time for do-overs. Regret is something for later in life. The past is the past. Now is a time of optimism, failure, and do-it-again. Looking back on having overcome an addiction to drugs, one young man said, “Now that I am where I am, it kinda makes me see it was bringing me down, even though I don’t regret it, I don’t really regret it at all. I think everything that you do makes you who you are, so I don’t really regret it.”²⁹

The Sacred Self. What matters is to be yourself. Every individual has the right to make his own choices. Smith states, “[Having no regrets] helps to protect a sense of personal self—which seems sacred to emerging adults—against threats to the ultimate good of ‘being yourself’ in a world in which the self is central, since actually having regrets implies that the self one has become embodies something that is wrong or undesirable. . . . Furthermore, the very idea of regrets presupposes a clear sense of good and bad, right and wrong by which to judge, which . . . many emerging adults lack.”³⁰

Moral Intuitionists. Truth is subjective, a matter of perspective, culturally conditioned, only strong opinions at best, and right and wrong are matters of intuition. Do what feels right based on how one is raised. When asked how such moral choices are made, one respondent said, “Intuition, sort of, I use judgment with everything like, it just kinda comes naturally. I can’t think of

²⁸ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, p. 56. ^{29, 30} Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, p. 41.

anything that really actively influences me to decide what's right or wrong, or good or bad. . . . I know in my heart if it's something that I'm just not comfortable doing, I would feel uncomfortable doing in my heart. I would say it's pretty easy to know. I have kind of a gut feeling with some things, so overall, it's pretty easy to trust my own instincts."³¹

Undefined “no strings attached” relationships. Old categories of “just friends,” “dating,” “going steady,” and “engaged” are no longer used. Phrases such as “hanging out,” “hooking up,” “moving in,” and “breaking up” leave a relationship undefined. The results are hurt or emotional detachment, emotional callousness, and sexual corruption.

Goals: The Good Life. The “good life” is pictured as middle class—nice house, reliable vehicles, four-wheeler. Education is merely a means to this goal. “What matters is getting the credits, earning the diploma, and becoming certified as a college-educated person so that one can get a better job, earn more money, and become a good salary earner and supporter of a (materially) comfortable and secure life.”³²

Religion is the elementary school of morality. It is comparable to driver's training. It is important for children, you need it, but once it is learned, you graduate and it is no longer relevant. It is fine, I'm glad someone is doing it. Religion makes good people.

Particulars are peripheral. Different practices or teachings are not important because the basic core is held in common. Love your neighbor.

God is out there somewhere, but not right here, right now. God is detached from daily life. I'm glad He is watching over everything. Religion is for adults with children, but it is not needed now.

Sociological Structures that Affect Religious Commitment

Certain life structures may either help or hinder the likelihood that emerging adults make religious commitments.

Disruptions. When moving away from home, the individual is suddenly exposed to a new network of relationships. He may have to leave his parent's church behind, and what is the likelihood he will seek out and find a new church with the same beliefs? His life is surrounded by new friends with new beliefs. The patterns of faith he once practiced are disrupted.

³¹ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, p. 46. ³² Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, p. 54.

Distractions. “Emerging adults are primarily dedicated in this phase of their lives to achieving their own financial, identity, and household independence from their parents. . . . Relating to God, going to religious services, reading scripture, getting involved in a religious community, praying regularly, growing in faith, and such concerns are rarely in American culture considered relevant to or important for achieving identity and financial independence.”³³

Differentiation. Emerging adulthood is a time to establish independence from parents by differentiating from them. Religion is a large factor in that transition. Smith states, “Religion . . . offers emerging adults an opportunity to achieve clear identity differentiations. . . . Furthermore, in most households, parents think they have already done their job in religious training; many directly tell their emerging adult children that their religious beliefs and practices are now their individual choices, that they stand on their own.”³⁴

Diversion. The expectations that our culture spells out in TV, magazines, and movies conflict with the expectations of God’s Word for those emerging adults who grew up learning God’s commandments. This diverse path is offered and even taken for granted by our culture, so that many emerging adults could imagine no other way of spending those twenty-something years. This conflict of conscience leads many emerging adults to put off religion until they are “ready to settle down.” Smith summarizes it in this way: “Major Premise: Serious religion means no partying and sex before marriage. Minor Premise: I do or may want to party and have sex before marriage. Conclusion: I am not legitimately part of or interested in serious religion.”³⁵ College life has become the diverse story that the culture has scripted: a time to have fun and for young people to “sow their oats” while making sure there are no strings attached.

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism—A Prevailing Belief System

In his first book, *Soul Searching*, Christian Smith defines the prevailing belief system among many young adults. He calls it “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” and defines it as follows.

Moralistic. The key to a happy life is to be a good person. “I believe in, well, my whole religion is where you try to be good and, ah, if you’re not good then you should just try to get better, that’s all.”³⁶

³³ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, p. 76. ³⁴ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, p. 78. ³⁵ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, p. 83.

³⁶ Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005, p. 163.

Therapeutic. The goal of religion is to make you feel happy and self-confident. “God is like someone who is always there for you, I don’t know, it’s like God is God. He’s just like somebody that’ll always help you go through whatever you’re going through. When I became a Christian I was just praying and it always made me feel better.”³⁷

Deism. God is supreme, but disconnected from daily life. “He’s watching over everything from above.”³⁸

During the interviews for Smith’s first book, teenagers used the phrase “feel happy” well more than 2,000 times. Moralistic Therapeutic Deism sees God as the cosmic therapist who is on call when you need Him, but not much concerned with you during off hours. He is watching over all things but is disconnected and distant. Sunday mornings keep Him employed and offer Him a place to work, but other than that, He pretty much stays out of the way. The moral counsel He offers is important, since it keeps people from being bad and that will make everyone’s lives better. Far be it from Him to say anything that might cause a person to feel bad about himself or to ask for a person to suffer for His purpose. Even if He does, He leaves it up to you to decide what advice you’d like to follow and what you’d rather ignore. His job is to offer you something to help you cope, to make you happy, or to improve your life. “God’s all around you, all the time. He believes in forgiving people and whatnot and he’s there to guide us, for somebody to talk to and help us through our problems. Of course, he doesn’t talk back.”³⁹

Churches, then, are here to invoke God’s advice on life as needed and to ask Him, as cosmic overseer, to bring us the things that will make our lives happy. Moralistic Therapeutic Deism might very well be the dominant religious view among Americans.⁴⁰

Parents and Trajectory

Perhaps the most telling, yet also self-evident finding in Smith’s research is the influence of parents and socialization in the religious trajectory of American youth. Smith reports that among teens interviewed, about three in

^{37, 38} Smith and Denton, *Souls Searching*, p. 164. ³⁹ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, p. 165.

⁴⁰“The cultural influence of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism may also be nudging American civil religion in a ‘softer,’ more inclusive, ecumenical, and multi-religious direction. What in American civil religion that is conservative becomes more compassionate, what is liberal becomes more inclusive, and aspects that are particularistic are increasingly universalized. All can then together hold hands and declare in unison, ‘Everyone decides for themselves!’” (Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, p. 170.)

four identify their own beliefs with that of their parents. He shows that contrary to popular belief about the rebellious, self-alienating nature of teens, most are content to identify with and follow in the faith of their parents. Also contrary to what many assume, this trajectory does not change as radically as one might think when the adolescent goes off to college. The religious practice and commitment may decline, and likely will decline among many, but the belief structures do not so quickly change.

When asked how they know what is right and wrong, the vast majority of emerging adults refer to their parents and church as the source of their morality. Now this is a far cry from having conviction to practice what you believe or being able to identify God as the source of all truth, yet it does say something. Smith concludes that parents are the most influential, powerful factor in the religious trajectory of youth as they venture through the teenage years and into emerging adulthood. "One of the most powerful factors [on emerging adult religious outcomes] was the religious lives of their parents—how often they attended religious services, how important religious faith was in their own lives and so on."⁴¹

Contrary to popular opinion, parents are not irrelevant when it comes to the religious thinking of children, teens, or emerging adults. It might take some time to show itself, but the influence of parents is not soon abandoned. The faith and practice of the parents often becomes, for better or worse, the faith and practice of the children.⁴² In the words of Shakespeare, "What's past is prologue." In the words of God, "*Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it*" (Proverbs 22:6).

Likewise, the influence of a congregation, a mentor, or an adult role model plays a significant part in establishing or maintaining the religious identity of those who are emerging out of childhood into adulthood. This influence is second only to that of the parents.

One Foot In, One Foot Out

The lives of emerging adults are surrounded by transitions and uncertainty. Smith compares this phase to having one foot in and one foot out of a boat. They are attempting to establish their identity as adults independent of their

⁴¹ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, p. 285.

⁴² "Those who keep believing and practicing religion with serious devotion during the emerging adult years are those who were the most invested in religion to begin with" (Smith and Snell, p.283)

parents, and yet, in many ways, they are still children, relying on their parents for support and in need of their guidance. They are gaining freedom every moment, but lacking the divine guidance to know what to do with it.

Due in part to the influence of postmodern subjectivism, this leads to a lack of conviction along with an inability to make moral decisions and cultural judgments. Without a conviction for the story God has scripted, emerging adults can do little more than go along with the flow. They are, in the words of Smith, “sovereign individuals lacking conviction.”

Emerging adults are determined to be free. But they do not know what is worth doing with their freedom. They work very hard to stand on their own two feet. But they do not really know where they ought to go and why, once they are standing. They lack larger visions of what is true and real and good, in both the private and the public realms. And so, it seems to us, a small set of predefined default imperatives quickly rush in to fill that normative and moral vacuum. One of these is mass consumerism’s slavish obsession with private material comfort and possessions, the achieving of which nearly every emerging adult views as a key purpose in life. Other imperatives, in the meantime, may be the amusements of alcohol and drug intoxication and the temporary thrills of hook-up sex. Yet even in the early emerging adult years, signs were evident to us that many already find these culturally given, default purposes, amusements, and thrills unsatisfying, if not outright wounding. Many know there must be something more, and they want it. Many are uncomfortable with their inability to make truth statements and moral claims without killing them with the death of a thousand qualifications. But they do not know what to do about that, given the crisis of truth and values that has destabilized their culture. And so they simply carry on as best they can, as sovereign, autonomous, empowered individuals who lack a reliable basis for any particular conviction or direction by which to guide their lives.⁴³

Why Does It Matter?

A pastor once sat down with a young mother to talk about why she hadn’t been coming to church. She had recently had a baby outside of marriage, but was open to a visit from the pastor. She still claimed to believe in God and she agreed that church was important. However when he asked her why God and

⁴³ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, p. 294.

church matter, there was no response, just a blank stare. And he blankly stared back at her. He asked her how she makes choices in her life about what is right and what is wrong. Her answer, “I don’t know pastor, I pretty much just go with the flow.” It was almost as if no one had ever asked her such a question. She had no idea how to respond other than a blank stare and a “go with the flow” sort of shrug.

I remember those days of emerging adulthood. I remember those college years—filled with work, school, and friends—with little time to think about God or why He matters. He mattered to me, I knew, but I struggled to say why. So many of my friends didn’t even try to think about an answer to that question, that can wait until you get older. “Shrug and go with the flow.”

That sort of thinking changed when I saw the blank stare on my grandmother’s face as she lay in a coma. I visited her in the hospital during finals week, but this was one test I hadn’t expected. She was dearly loved by us all—a good friend, a loving wife, a kind mother and grandmother, a humble, faithful Christian. This was the first time I had seen someone close to me die. Suddenly I found myself thinking about what really matters. Death had visited the family, and the truth of our fleeting existence was lying right in front of me. Suddenly, God mattered.

Death is the ultimate reality check, and when we stand in the face of it, truth matters. Death is the experience that no atheist can deny, it is the reality that no postmodernist can escape.

In New Orleans, on the side of an old boarded-up building, there is a wall covered with the world’s dying wishes. It is the work of artist Candy Chang. She has stenciled the unfinished statement across the top in chalkboard paint, “Before I die, I want to . . .” Random people are invited to finish the statement. They come, they leave their thoughts, and they leave. “Before I die, I want to . . . plant a tree.” “Before I die, I want to . . . straddle the international date line.” “Before I die, I want to . . . sail around the world . . . go skydiving . . . visit Amsterdam . . . explore another culture.” “Before I die, I want to . . . make a difference . . . fulfill my purpose . . . see the world become a better place . . . be completely myself.”

In many ways, Ms. Chang’s wall is a reflection of the postmodern coping mechanism—a collage of different ideas about life and death, a sort of Facebook plastering of whatever is on people’s minds. For so many, it is nothing more than the Epicurean slogan, “Eat, drink, and celebrate!” This is the postmodern therapy at work—coping with death by doing this or accomplishing that. Yet, down deep, we know as fun as it is to make a bucket list, it doesn’t help us deal with the truth of death.

We know there is an ugliness to death that makes us appreciate and desire life. Down deep, every emerging adult and every postmodern thinker is troubled by a lack of conviction, an inability to make judgments on the culture, and fleeting efforts to fill the void of time in one's life with stuff. Because we know that life is not something over which we have control, this is the ultimate question with which death confronts us. From where does life come? Why are we living?

From our very conception, life is not something that is ours to achieve. Life is not something that we do, or that we earn, or that we can demand. It is purely a gift from God.

An unborn child receives nourishment and protection from the womb of his mother. A small infant cries to his mother, and she gives him milk from her very body and holds him in her own arms and sings to him with her own voice. A farmer plants a seed and waits for the soil and rain to produce a crop. A family sits down to a meal and receives what has been prepared. We breathe, our heart beats, our mind thinks—all without us ever having to agree to do so. Job confesses, *"The Spirit of God has made me, And the breath of the Almighty gives me life"* (Job 33:4).

God matters because death is real and sin is real and life is something that is not ours to take, but it is something that must be given to us by God.

What can we do?

What can we do? The short answer is, "Nothing." We are born to receive what God gives. From the moment of our conception, we learn that life is a matter of trusting and receiving. This is a First Commandment teaching.

Luther explained in the *Large Catechism* under the First Commandment that our god is whatever we turn to for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need. In other words, to whom do you give thanks for the good that you receive and where do you turn for help in times of trouble? Blessing and protection, food and shelter, nourishment and help are the necessities of life. We can do nothing but receive.

The real question is, "Where do we look for blessing and where do we turn for help?" The answer to this depends very much on whether we can rely on God for these things or whether we need to look elsewhere. Is God worth it? Is He worth relying on? Can we know He is really there to provide, to bless, to help, to save? The psalmist writes, *"Know that the Lord, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves"* (Psalm 100:3). We need God's

enlightenment so that we might know Him as He has revealed Himself, and in Him is where the real answer to the real question is found.

The foundational teaching that God is the giver of life and we are the recipients of His revelation is what the postmodernist needs. This brings us into God's story—the foundational events and overarching story that provides hope and can be counted on for truth.

Professor John Schaller argues that to try to prove the truth of the Scriptures from Scripture passages is futile. The sufficiency of the Word is a matter of faith, not intellect. So he writes, "Conviction regarding the divine inspiration of Scripture is not obtained through arguments from the Scriptures—and be they ever so keen—but only through the witness which Scripture itself presents."⁴⁴ That is to say, conviction concerning the truth of Christ, can be found only by witnessing the truth of Christ. He has come to bear witness to the truth, not to prove it. But in that witness, we have the truth. In Christ the truth has become flesh and walked and talked and worked great works among us. In Christ the truth of our sins has hung from a cross and died. In Christ the truth of life has risen from death and is borne witness to in a life that never ends.

We can do nothing more than witness it. We read, we listen, we see with our mind, and we witness Christ. We witness, we receive, and through the Spirit's work we believe. This is where the enlightenment and postmodernism both went wrong. Modernism offered us a truth which was known through reason, postmodernism offered us a truth which was known through experience. Yet, they both have something in common—both are from within us. But there is another way, one which does not come about by human reason or intuition. It is the way of revelation. It is the way of faith.

This is where the foundational story of God becomes our own. The truth as to why God matters is a matter of revelation in the Holy Spirit. Knowledge of this truth is a working of faith in the heart of those who receive the Word. Christ has come to bear witness to the truth, and it is ours only to receive and to share that witness.

Receiving and Witnessing Christ Daily

In his first book, Christian Smith demonstrates how teenagers' lives are dominated by school and homework; beyond that, their time is occupied with

⁴⁴ Schaller, "Der Besitz der Wahrheit"

sports, hanging out with friends, or some sort of electronic media like television, movies, and the internet. Smith points out, “[This] simply reflects the fact that there is very little built-in religious content or connection in the structure of most U.S. adolescents’ daily schedules and routines.”⁴⁵

In response, I offer the following as a means to open up conversation on this topic in our churches, homes, and relationships. We pray that through the Holy Spirit’s work in the lives of individual Christians, the body of Christ will grow in love. What we want is to bring the voice of Christ into the conversation that is taking place between our culture and the next generation of Christians.

Church is more than a Sunday thing. While sitting out between basketball games at the gym, the young man next to me asked if I knew about the “open gym” on Sunday mornings. I responded, “I go to church Sunday mornings.” Without batting an eye, he said, “Oh, you have to do your Sunday thing.”

Perhaps we could increase our emphasis on the real purpose of the divine service. It is not a “to do” on the list of tasks for the week ahead, rather it is what gives meaning and value to the week ahead. In the gift of Word and sacrament, God’s revelation comes to us, and His presence is among us. He gives us His name and His blessing that we might receive Him in body and blood and take Him with us into the world. We receive Christ on Sunday so that we can give Him to others on Monday in our good words and works. We need to overcome this disconnect from God on Sunday vs. God in our daily lives.

Church is more than an accessory. A church member had not been to church in some time. A letter of encouragement was sent. The response was a voice message, “If I want to go to church, I will go to church. If I don’t want to go, then I won’t.” For many, church is a kind of accessory. Especially among emerging adults, church is seen as something that comes with the diaper bag you acquire when you become a parent.

The gospel of salvation comes to sinners through Word and sacrament. On its own, the altar is just a wooden table and the pulpit is just a place to rest your Bible. But when God’s name is invoked it is more than just a table and a lectern. When the bread is served, when wine is poured, when the Word is proclaimed in the midst of God’s people, God is inviting us into His presence to bless us, and there He gives us the privilege to worship and give thanks to Him. There He equips us for every phase of life, and there He reaches into our world

⁴⁵ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, p. 130.

to go with us into every phase of life. God is not just forgiving our sins, but blessing us and calling us to good works.

This emphasis on God's revealed presence in Word and sacrament inevitably requires a rejection of the seeker-driven tenets of postmodernism. Choosing a church is not a buffet line where we are able to pick and choose what we like. Conducting ministry is not a matter of having the best corporate vision. Growing membership is not about growing numbers. Teaching Scripture is not about learning how to improve your life. Church is the place of God's dwelling, where we receive what He would give us, namely, His name, His grace, and His abiding presence in Christ Jesus. This is where we learn to worship Him and confess His name according to what He has instituted in His Word.

Church is not the elementary school of morality. It is not an uncommon view that the church teaches children how to be good people, but once they have learned the basics, they are "good to go."

This idea can be especially challenging for us with regard to the rite of confirmation. Confirmation is often perceived as a sort of graduation ceremony—you study, you pass an exam, and there is a party with gifts.

How might we show that receiving the Lord's Supper is not based on the requirement of passing a confirmation exam? How can we show that studying the Word of God and confessing the faith is not something that is just for children? How can we nourish and rejuvenate an appreciation of baptism as something to be made use of throughout one's life, especially in personal daily devotion? Let's wrestle with and pray about these and other challenges together.

Vocation as a means of God's blessing. "The doctrine of vocation has to do, above all, with the way God works through human beings. . . . God, who created everything, governs and rules this physical world, including ourselves in our physical lives, by providentially working through the natural order and through the vocations of ordinary human beings."⁴⁶

God is not so distant as many might think. An awareness of God's presence in vocation as well as in creation can foster a heart which has reason to give thanks, to call upon Him in every need, and to find a love for neighbor that draws one outside of oneself. Drawing attention to vocation could go a long

⁴⁶ Veith, Gene Edward and Mary J. Moerbe. *Family Vocation: God's Calling in Marriage, Parenting, and Childhood*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012, pp. 22ff.

way toward helping us see God as more than just someone who watches over everything. We should see God as our Creator and Preserver who is involved in everything, even to the point of the Son of God's suffering along with His creation in human flesh and bringing about restoration by His own resurrection.

Parents as God's primary instrument for spiritual formation. It cannot be denied that among all the vocations of this world, family is the most fundamental. It is the primary means for God's work of spiritual and devotional formation. Smith notes that one of the most common desires for teenagers in regard to their family is to be closer to their parents. "This was only one piece of a larger body of evidence that drove home to us the fact that very many adolescents not only objectively need strong connections to mature adults in their lives, but they actually themselves semiconsciously want those connections. However, given the culture's controlling stereotypes and myths about teenagers being 'from another planet,' and so on . . . teenagers simply have a hard time asking for that connection or knowing how to make it happen"⁴⁷

The little six year old has just gone running down the hall with his bowl of cheerios, tripped, and launched them all over the floor. As a parent, which is a more effective teaching technique: telling the boy that he shouldn't have been running with his bowl of cheerios and complaining that you have to vacuum them up, or showing him where the vacuum is, how to turn it on, and helping him learn how to use it?

Teaching is more than just giving information. It includes the process of practice. God has placed parents in the foundational calling of teaching their children to practice the faith. This is more than sending them to Sunday School or complaining at them when they do something wrong. It is daily bringing them into the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Immersion in the Word. Most teenagers' schedules, and even many young children's schedules, are dominated by school, homework, sports, TV, and friends. As cited earlier, ". . . there is very little built-in religious content or connection in the structure of most U.S. adolescents' daily schedules and routines." What they fill their time with will be what they consider most important.

⁴⁷ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, p. 344, footnote 4.

In Deuteronomy chapter 6, God reveals that His Word is not just something for Sunday, rather it is a part of virtually every aspect of our lives. *“You shall impress (engrave by memorization) them upon your children, and talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk along the road, and when you lie down for sleep and when you wake in the morning”* (Deuteronomy 6:7, author’s translation).

There is a calling here for all parents to realize and assume. At the family altar, children learn the faith, they practice the faith, and they adopt the faith. By adopting rituals, even one so simple as an evening dinner together, parents find opportunity to impress these words upon their children. This is not brainwashing and should never be done mechanically. Rather, this should be seen as the way God’s Holy Spirit comes to us through the hearing of the Word (1 Timothy 4:5).

Likewise, those who are most firmly grounded in the conviction of their faith as emerging adults are those for whom their religious practices are woven into the different aspects of their lives. Christian Day Schools provide a daily habitat for young minds to be immersed in the Word of God and fellowship with Christians in almost every aspect of their schedule. Home schooling is a very challenging—but endlessly rewarding—means of building up your child in the importance of faith and family. Above all, no matter where a child goes to school, this is about daily ritual in the ways parents spend their time with their children. It is as simple as reading one part of the catechism each evening, or praying each morning at breakfast, or having a special devotion Saturday night before church the next day.

Adult mentors and congregations as cultivators of character. Some churches have tried mentoring programs with confirmands. Beyond this, there is simply a need to take an interest in the teenagers and college students in your church. They are reaching a point where they are looking to be accepted in a new way by adults. Is there a place for them to ask questions in Adult Bible Class? Even if they don’t feel like asking questions or talking much, if older adults care about them, it won’t be forgotten.

The Church as a refuge. As postmodernism makes its way into churches, we find much ministry designed to follow the impulses of the culture. The divisions that have taken place in the church are now thought of as historically irrelevant and even a positive thing as we embrace diversity. The seeker movement has abandoned doctrinal assertions in favor of a loosely defined confession of “I love Jesus.” There is little in these churches to demand any sort of convictions in their faith. Instead, they adopt the therapeutic approach,

trying to make people improve their lives and feel better about their futures. And because these churches aim to become mega-churches, they outgrow the chance for people to know and love each other personally. It leaves people not sure about where they stand, what their basis is for having peace with God, how to say what they believe, and with whom they are believing and practicing the faith.

As we consider our history as a church body, we find ample reason to give thanks to God for preserving the truth of His Word among us. Spiritual pitfalls abound, but there are a number of ways in which the Lord has preserved us by His grace.

The CLC was founded by those who found such conviction in the truth of God's Word that they abandoned earthly ties so that they might manifest the unity they share in God's heavenly fellowship.

Doctrinal truth, first and foremost, is leading us in how we practice our faith. This testimony silences the devil (Revelation 12:11). We have been given the heritage of God's Word through the Lutheran heritage so soundly built upon that Word. Because it is drawn from the very Word of God, Lutheran teaching and practice has put away the abuses of Roman Catholicism, condemned the rationalist approach of secular Christianity, and avoided the subjective influences of pietism and the charismatic movement. This theology is a gift of the Spirit. Let us thank God for it.

We practice the faith liturgically, and we do so in terms of law and gospel. The liturgy emphasizes God's work for us and His revelation to us. This guards us against the ditches of trusting in reason on the one hand or relying on our feelings on the other. Instead, peace is made with God when He sanctifies us and draws us into His saving grace to us through Word and sacrament.

There is blessing in the organizational structure of our church body which provides for strong lay-involvement in leadership rather than a clergy-dominated bureaucracy. Evangelical church discipline is practiced within the congregations and synodically—admonition and resolution led by the Word of God. This is how Christ intended it (Matthew 18:15ff, Galatians 6:1ff).

In our churches and within our church body, we have a place of refuge against postmodernism, because our teachings and practice are based on an objective view of Scripture, and we aren't afraid to assert that. The Word forms the basis for us to answer all questions and concerns among us. It also boldly and unabashedly saves us through the power of the gospel and the testimony of Christ's resurrection. The questions to ask yourself are, "When

someone asks me why I drive past eighteen other churches before I get to mine, can I respond with something more than Romans 16:17? Can I articulate these positive reasons?"

The fundamental nature of discipleship is to be brought under the cross of Christ and to place its hope in His resurrection. This can never be accomplished from within ourselves, or our methods of ministry, or our committee resolutions. Rather, it is something God must give to us. He lays His cross on us by showing us the evil and hopeless nature of our flesh so that we would despair of ourselves and call on His name for the hope that only He can give. He has secured salvation for us in the cross and offers hope to us in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This generation can do nothing greater for the next than to receive Christ for themselves daily: in our churches, in our homes, in our personal devotion and lives; and then witness to others as they practice it daily.

Conclusion: The Most Dangerous Truth

As I stood by the hospital bedside, I watched as every few moments her body called out for another breath. The truth of it was arresting, captivating. The truth was undeniable: sooner or later, my grandmother was going to die. If this is to be the end of the story, then indeed, we should be the Epicureans. We should eat, drink, and enjoy what we can while we can. We should try to get as much out of life as possible before the truth sets in. Or we can make up our own stories about what might happen after death, what might be, what could be going on for those who have died. We can search out the gods—things to fill our moments, to help us cope, to give us something worth living for. We can adopt the therapeutic model and do as Freud told us, "resign yourself."

But nothing will allow us to escape the truth, and that truth is standing right in front of us. In the words of Scripture, the witness has been given. Jesus stands before Pilate and says, "I have come to bear witness to the truth" (John 18:37). He has come to die, and the witness He gives is this: He was crucified for our sins and raised for our justification. Whoever believes in Him has everlasting life, and whoever does not remains under eternal condemnation.

The question must be asked: Did Christ rise from the dead or not? On this question hinges the authenticity of all He has claimed to be and has come to do. The answer either proves His superiority and the superiority of His teaching to that of all other religions, or it relegates Him to just another man,

and His Word to just another comment in the endless stream opinions, religious thoughts, and moral claims. The answer either offers us an objective revelation and judgment of God or imprisons us in subjective perspectives of who Jesus is and what He means to us personally.

This is why apologist Ken Samples calls the resurrection “the most dangerous idea.” What he means is that all truth rests in whether or not the resurrection of Jesus really happened. Skeptics, agnostics, atheists—they all have objections. They all have reasons why they do not believe the resurrection to be true. They point to supposed contradictions; they contrive conspiracy theories. They discredit historical witnesses. But ultimately, when these objections are put to the test, they really don’t stand. There are more historical documents supporting the claim to Jesus’ resurrection than all the writings of Homer and Plato and other authors from that time combined. Thousands of copies of New Testament writings were made. Hundreds of witnesses concurred.

In the end, the argument boils down to the question of resurrection from the dead. Is a resurrection possible? Does God have the power to raise the dead? Did God raise Jesus from the dead? The resurrection is rejected by some not because there is evidence proving otherwise, but simply because they say, “That’s impossible.”

They say, “Show me a miracle and I will believe,” yet when God shows it to them, they say, “Well, that can’t be, that’s impossible.” And that is because you can’t prove this truth to them. The resurrection can not be reasoned. It also can not be felt. It can only be witnessed. Either we believe it, or we do not. That is why the resurrection is the most dangerous idea. It confronts us with our mortality, our sinfulness, the reality of our death, and our need for God to give us life. It also brings us into the knowledge of God’s saving work for us in His Son. It bears witness to the truth that Jesus is the Son of God. And this is a great risk for us, for it is all or nothing. It completely changes how we look at the world, how we look at church, how we look at God.

“Before I die I want to. . . .” There on that wall in New Orleans (p. 40), we find a metaphor for a postmodern world—a multitude of voices each stating its own idea about life and what it should hold while basically giving up on the idea that there is unified, universal truth about life after death and only one way to know it. Yet, from that wall came one voice that was different. In the midst of all those ideas about what to do before death, there was one who wrote, “I will never die; I believe in Jesus.”

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most dangerous truth. It differentiates Christ from all other gods. It is the foundational witness to the truth of God which silences all other competing claims. And yet, we cannot prove it anymore than we can prove that God exists. We can only witness it and become witnesses to it. It is this witness to the truth which Jesus has revealed for us and which now becomes our own as we stand in the face of death and speak truth to the world.

I found myself standing in the face of death and the truth of it—my grandmother was going to die. But it was in the face of that truth that I witnessed something I will never forget. Slowly her body began to call for oxygen less and less, until there was one last breath, and it was over. But there in the face of death, having just lost the love of his life, my grandfather stood up and said, “I’d like us to sing the doxology.”

There from that hospital room, in the face of death, was a small group of Christians speaking truth to the world. It filled the room. It echoed down the hallways. It was hope. We were taking part in God’s greater story, one that has no end. That is what changes everything for us as Christians. It makes each day a day of life, a day of hope, a day of joy, a day of God’s living presence in our lives. The resurrection enables us to stand in the face of sin, death, the devil, and every evil and trial, and sing,

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

From the truth of the resurrection comes a new reality, a new hope, a new way of looking at the world. To sing in the face of death is to proclaim an objective conviction: that God exists, that He is the creator of all the world, that He has become flesh and entered into our world, that He has saved His creation from its fallen demise, that He has sent His Holy Spirit into the world to bring us the unified language of the gospel, that He is coming again.

What is left when the Spirit has done His work is the only real, lasting, positive community: the Church of Jesus Christ. Within this fellowship is conviction. Here is the conviction of God’s abiding presence in our lives. Here is conviction to practice repentance and faith daily, to look to God for all good, and to call upon Him in every trouble. Here is conviction to live in the waters of baptism, drawn into the truth of who Jesus is and who we are in Him. Here is

conviction to wait and to hope for His return. Death is the reality which no one can deny. Jesus' resurrection is the most dangerous idea without which no one can live.

What will it take to open up this conversation? What time and patience will it take to listen, to understand the questions that are being asked? What effort will be needed to get a better sense of what the culture is up to? Do we even stop to think about how our children learn and what influences are indoctrinating them in the ways of the world? With Jesus and with God's help day by day, our words and actions, our care for the spiritual needs of our children and fellow Christians in our congregation, our efforts to serve those who have not yet come to believe and to share the witness of Christ's resurrection with the world will not prove fruitless.

Let us stand firmly grounded and united in the fellowship of Christ's Church, for it is in that Church that Christ's voice is heard—a voice which now has every reason and opportunity to sing in the face of death and testify to the truth of God to the next generation—the truth that the world needs now more than ever.

Bibliography

- Gratz, Stanley J. *A Primer on Postmodernism*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 1996.
- Jacob, Margaret C. *The Enlightenment: A Brief History with Documents*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001.
- Kolb, Robert, and Charles P. Arand. *The Genius of Luther's Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008.
- Manning, Philip. "Philip Rieff's Moral Vision of Sociology: From Positive to Negative Communities - and Back?" *Journal of Classical Sociology* J Classical Sociol 3.3 (2003): 235-46. Web.
- Meyer, John P., and O. Marc Tangner. *The Kingdom of Christ*. New Ulm, MN: Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church?, 2002.
- Schaeffer, Francis A. *How Should We Then Live?: The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture*. Old Tappan, NJ: F.H. Revell, 1976.
- Schaller, Prof. John. "The Possession of the Truth (Der Besitz der Wahrheit)." Trans. Henry C. Nitz. *Theologische Quartalschrift* XI (1914): 209-31. Translated by Henry C. Nitz (www.wlsessays.net)

Smith, Christian, and Melinda Lundquist Denton. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005.

Smith, Christian, and Patricia Snell. *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009.

Veith, Gene Edward, and Mary J. Moerbe. *Family Vocation: God's Calling in Marriage, Parenting, and Childhood*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.

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

