Postmodernism & Mission in the 21st Century
Tom McCormick
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I. INTRODUCION

Postmodernism as a word has become both popular and at the same time rather meaningless. It has always been imprecise at best, and certainly bears many diverse meanings and interpretations for reasons that are intrinsic to the phenomenon in question. About all it was ever intended to mean is "something (as yet neither clear nor precise) after 'modernism'," which of course shifts the weight of our concerns to understanding "modernism."

If I were to claim, as I now will, that "modern" is equivalent to "Western," and go on to point out that much of 21st Century Mission still has much to do with what has been called the "non-Western world," then it would *not* be difficult to see why I am enthusiastic about the prospects so-called postmodernism might offer for the Western—and global—missionary task. If I were to go on to reiterate the noncontroversial claim that Western-modern culture is itself in crisis and very much in need of (re)evangelization and renewal, then the stakes are raised considerably. If, in addition, the Christian Church (including its mission agencies) might itself be influenced by that Western culture as many claim, then we would be wise to let our Lord use "postmodern voices" to search our hearts and lives for remaining blind spots of hidden complicity. Thus, I recommend attending to this "postmodernism phenomenon" not only as a source of insight (unto action) with regard to the Great Commission Task of reaching the unreached (out there), but also as a means of refining our own sensitivities to and deliverance from the subtle and deadly forces at work shaping Christian conformity to this world amongst our organizations and within each one of us. Any way we look at it, the stakes are high and the hazards great. As one "father" of postmodernism liked to put it, quoting the poet, "Where the danger is, there the saving power grows," a thought very much like Bosch's understanding of the opportunity afforded by the crisis the church-mission finds itself in today (1991).

Let me preliminarily say that indeed postmodernism is a crisis, specifically a crisis of transcendence. By 'transcendence" I mean just about anything other than that which was taken as the one and only self-assured point of reference by modernism: the autonomous, logico-rational, self-attesting, self-positing, self-justifying and self-defined human individual self. Prioritizing and explicating that self-assured human reference point was, of course, the project of the Enlightenment by which Western/modern culture has been more or less defined since. It was the project of Descartes and Kant and Bacon and Newton, and it has been carried on for centuries now in the Universities and laboratories of the world. In addition, its contours have been well-studied and criticized by Christian and non-Christian alike now for many decades. Some might say, "If that is all you mean by postmodernism, then what's the big deal? We too have been aware of and opposed to that Enlightenment project." The problem for us western Christians, though, is that the forms of complicity which have become so self-serving and self-justifying are often quite hidden, diverse and difficult to uproot.

Before we look more carefully at what postmodernism is and how it might help the Western missionary, let me suggest a postmodernism "theme song" for Christians, the traditional hymn "My Hope is Built on Nothing Less." The chorus goes right to the point of the post/modern problem: "On the Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand...." One summary form of the modernism to which postmodernism is opposed characterizes modernism as "foundationalism" and therefore postmodernism is often labeled "anti-foundationalism," usually to the (self-righteous) chagrin of Western Christians. My reading of postmodernism, however, affirms its success at

pointing out with astonishing relevance the prevalence of the "sinking sands" that have been taken as sure foundations, both within the Church and otherwise. This ought not surprise nor alarm us, for we already know that all things in both heaven and earth are being shaken, and only that which cannot be shaken will remain (Heb. 12:25-29); indeed, all things are being subsumed in and under Jesus (Eph. 1:10), the only foundation which can be laid (1 Corinthians 3:11). That, anyway, is my conviction, and because of that understanding I am largely unthreatened by postmodernism, and in fact, grateful for and often delighted by what the "postmodernists" says. This is not to say that I am uncritical of postmodernists or that I think they are Christian, though more than a few seem to me to be "not far from the Kingdom."

On the other hand, I would heartily agree with a lot of the criticisms leveled against postmodernism by Christian thinkers, though suggest that the object of their critiques would be better understood as forms of hyper- or excessive or inflated modernism which have not yet seen through to the need to move on to some sort of a genuine "post." Finally, though, to be fair, I am also quite willing to concede that until "the other" which *post*-modernism (of whatever form) affirms truly exalts the Triune God revealed by the Holy Spirit in the self-attesting Christ Jesus of the Bible, the "**post**" falls short of the call, and thus to very real extent falls back into a modernism of one sort or another.

What, then, is this modernism which postmodernism seeks to transcend, and what is the relevance of this for us? I will approach this in 3 steps: *first*, in terms of well-known cross-cultural contrasts between the West and the non-West; *second*, in terms of various dualities and strategies identified by postmodernists thinkers; and *third*, in terms of a few more general characterizations of modernism which go to the heart of who we might be as western Christians. [[3. Science, planning, predicting, control, spirit, mind, heart, affection; Newbigin: politics, math/science, structures; prayer]]

II. CROSS-CULTURAL CONTRASTS BETWEEN THE WEST AND THE NON-WEST

Most training courses in cross-cultural communications use a chart something like the following. You might be interested in scoring your own personal values, then those of your organization, and finally, your perception of Western versus non-Western cultures.

Mapping Cultures ©[i]

Environment

Control	1	2	3	Harmony	6	7	8	Constraint
(environment can be changed for humans)				(human-world harmony)		(fate, luck control humans)		

Time

Single focus	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Multi-focus
(one task at a time)						*(high commitment to relationship building)*			

Fixed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Fluid
(time conscious)								*(punctuality not an issue)*	

Future	1	2	3	Present	6	7	8	Past
(long range goals)			*(immediate results)*			*(precedents, tradition)*		

Action

Doing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Being
(achievement, performance)						*(affiliations, character, nurturing, trust)*			

Communication

Low context   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   High context
(explicit meanings, facts and words)   *(implicit understanding from shared experience)*

Direct   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   Indirect
(explicit communication, management of conflict)   *(implicit communication, conflict avoidance)*

Instrumental   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   Expressive
(unemotional, impersonal, objective)   *(emotional, personal, subjective)*

Informal   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   Formal
(no ceremony or rigid protocol)   *(follows protocol, social customs)*

Space

Private   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   Public
(individual orientation, distance between individuals)   (group orientation, proximity of individuals)

Power

Equality   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   Hierarchy
(minimization of levels of power)   *(value placed on power differences)*

Individualism

Individualistic 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   Collectivist
(independence highly valued, "I" over "we")   (loyalty valued, individual subordinate to group)

Universalistic 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   Particularistic
(abstract rules, absolute truth identifiable, applicable to all) (relationships before abstract rules)

Competitiveness

Competitive   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   Cooperative
(achievement, material success, assertiveness)   *(quality of life, relationships, interdependence)*

Structure

Order   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   Flexibility
(need for predictability, rules, conflict threatening)
(tolerance of ambiguity, unpredictability, dissent acceptable)

Thinking

Deductive   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   Inductive
(reasoning based on theory and logic)   *(reasoning based on experimentation and experience)*

Linear   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   Systematic
(analytical thinking, problems into small chunks)   *(holistic thinking, big picture, interrelationships)*

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With a very few exceptions I submit that the left-hand side represents "the West" and the right-hand side "the non-West." And further, the right-hand side also largely represents the "postmodernism shift."

III. MODERN DUALITIES AND POSTMODERN STRATEGIES

It must be said that the preceding way of categorizing in terms of dichotomies is itself a rather Western way of looking at things. We have attempted to mitigate this western influence by giving something of a continuum, though the quantification of values is itself also quite western. Nonetheless, postmodernism has also attended to this dualistic style of thinking, as well as sought to overcome its limitations. Many dualities have been noted in the postmodernism literature, some of which are the following:

> intelligible/sensible; interior/exterior; subject/object; soul/body; suprasensuous/sensuous; individual/community; self/other; community/earth; real/image; real/representation; work/play; public/private; civilized/primitive; matter/spirit; fact/value; good/evil; essence/appearance; theory/observation; abstract/concrete; reason/emotion; reason/desire; reason/imagination; reason/spirit; part/whole; content/form; male/female; origin(al)/copy; proper/improper; univocity/polysemy; presence/absence; mind/body; nature/culture; nature/history; presentation/representation; life/death; infinite/finite; conscious/non-conscious; depth/surface; general/particular; ideal/empirical; meaning/nonsense; signified/signifier; philosophy/mythology; being/not-being; identity/difference; truth/falsity; visible/invisible; speech/silence; reason/madness; episteme/doxa; God/man; speech/writing; philosophy/non-philosophy; word/spirit; logic/metaphor; science/poetry.

You will notice a variety of kinds of dualisms, a point not always clarified in postmodernism writings. For instance, I am not willing to accept that the God/man or good/evil dualisms are of the same kind as the others. The point often emphasized, however, is that these dualisms are not neutral, but rather one of them (usually the first listed) has been prioritized over the other as of greater worth, and often granted the privilege of a political or social position of dominance and/or control. The strategy, then, often employed of postmodernists is a two-step procedure: first, to reverse the priority (a kind of affirmative action); and second, to maintain a creative (and more equal) tension between the two while remaining alert for a new form of relation between the categories. This process in effect "deconstructs" the old order while (in its best practitioners) awaiting the arrival of something new and undefinable in the terms inherited by the old order. It is because this "new" cannot be contained in or explained by the older categories (how could something genuinely **new**?) that the "post" of postmodernism is so appropriate. Further, it is because this "new" often remains either undefined as a "not yet" or doesn't fit the old categories that critics of postmodernism often jump to the labels of "relativism" or "nihilism." Finally, because these dualisms are so pervasive in Western culture, as well as so often taken for granted as natural or even God-given, that to tamper with them in this "deconstructive" manner is so very threatening to many.

To give one example of a good missiologist missing the point in a very common way regarding this two-step procedure, I cite Chuck Lowe's understanding of postmodernism. You will see the missiological point immediately. In the context of critiquing "Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare" (SLSW) he reveals his understanding of postmodernism:

> As post-modernity supplants modernity, objectivity gives way to subjectivity, rationalism to emotionalism, scientism to spiritism, and mechanism to shamanism. In concrete terms, just as the Church Growth Movement was a manifestation of modernity's mechanistic worldview, so SLSW is an embodiment of post-modernity's spiritistic worldview. … The chief difference is that conformity to the mechanistic technique of modernity is being replaced by conformity to the spiritistic technique of post-modernity (Territorial Spirits 1998:151).

He is, of course, right to note such shifts but in themselves the shifts Lowe notes are only the first of the two-step, and do not *in themselves* constitute postmodernity at all. This is especially clear from Lowe's recognition that both poles of the dualities noted are governed by the idea and practice of "technique," perhaps *the* modern notion *par excellence*. Lowe himself almost acknowledged this on the preceding page when he insightfully noted that the "fly in the ointment" in all this is "the assumption that there is a key to success and that it lies in method" (150). What he failed to grasp is that the centrality of method is at the very heart of modernism, and that postmodernism both recognizes this and is seeking to overcome it. In short, he reveals his own "modern stance (and preference)" for understanding and critiquing postmodernism.

Again, let me quickly add that I am not hereby affirming the practices or results of all postmodernists; there is a great variety of postmodernism-*s*, and some of them are indeed either relativistic and/or nihilistic. My point here is only that in many cases this need not be true, for there is, in fact, something amiss with this traditional form of dualistic thinking. That is, my claim is that unless and until such dualistic thinking is itself overcome, one remains within modernism.

IV. GENERAL CHARACTERIZATIONS OF POSTMODERNISM

There are many ways to characterize postmodernism. In this section I will give you definitions of postmodernism, some of the modernist background to the postmodernism response, eight consequences of modernism, and finally eight postmodernism themes in response to the dilemmas of modernism. The following and concluding section of this little paper draws out some of the missiological concerns and applications.

Here, then, are two "definitions" of postmodernism. Some of the language is not easy; but then too, I want to alert you to the fact that postmodernism is not an easy subject to consider. Postmodernism is an attempt to do the most profound kind of cultural and intellectual critique from within a phenomenon which is still very much developing and of which we too are a part. To do justice to the situation in which we find ourselves, we too must give ourselves to some disciplined thinking and dialogue. It is my hope that this kind of presentation might serve that end.

First definition: Postmodernism is a…

> debunking of modernism's epistemic foundations or metanarratives; a dethronement of the authority of positivistic science that essentializes differences between what appear to be self-possessing identities; an attack on the notion of a unified goal of history; and a deconstruction of the magnificent Enlightenment swindle of the autonomous, stable, and self-contained ego that is supposed to be able to act independently of its own history, its own indigenist strands of meaning-making and cultural and linguistic situatedness, and its inscriptions in the discourses of, among others, gender, race, and class (McLaren 1995:204f).

Here is another description from the perspective of a political scientist and philosopher. Postmodernism is the…

> experience of a certain rupture with, or distantiation from, central features of the 'modern area' – an era which was inaugurated culturally by the Renaissance and philosophically by Bacon and Descartes and which reached its political and economic culmination in capitalist market relations and in individualist or bourgeois liberalism (Dallmayr 1986:145).

Another list might read, modernism is a matter of…

> ...closed systematic thinking; centered in the human subject, reducing the non-subjective to mere object, instrumental rationality, the subordination of the human to technical power, the subjection of first-order experience to second-order criteria [e.g. "life as lived" to the canons of "reason"], the primacy of epistemology over ontology (Schmitz 1990:166).

Common words often associated with modernism include (in addition to those mentioned above) a prioritizing of methodological control, planning, predictability, progress, isolated individualism, impersonal "principles," analytical rationality, the mathematical, etc.

Finally, and before developing these matters a bit more, if you have not read David Bosch's treatment of the Enlightenment and mission, I would suggest doing so (*Transforming Mission*, chapters 9, 10). His 7 characteristics of the Enlightenment (=modernism) are: the preeminence of Reason, the subject-object schema, the elimination of purpose by causality, the belief in (infinite) progress, the fact/value dichotomy, a conviction that all problems are solvable, and an understanding of humans as emancipated and autonomous individuals (265ff). The implications for the history of missions are drawn out on pp. 342ff.

Let me now develop this a bit, and give you some more of the needed background required for a truly informed opinion. I start with the "arch-modernist," Rene Descartes.

> Descartes's dates are 1596-1650. Recall Calvin d. 1564; Luther d. 1546; Copernicus d. 1543; Council of Trent met 1545-1563. His "contemporaries" included Francis Bacon 1561-1626; Galileo 1564-1642; Kepler 1571-1630; Turretin 1623-1687; Pascal 1623-1662; Spinoza 1632-1677; Hobbes 1588-1679; Locke 1632-1704; ; Newton 1642-1717; Leibnitz 1646-1716; Kant 1724-1804.

The claim is often made, and with good reason, that the modern conception of man came to clearest expression first with Descartes. Most of us are familiar with his famous, *Cogito, ergo sum,* "I think, (therefore) I am." But what's the big deal with regard to this "*Cogito*" (=I think)?

With the *Cogito* came the shift to what earlier I called the "self-assured point of reference by modernism: the autonomous, logico-rational, self-attesting, self-positing, self-justifying and self-defined human individual self" and what McLaren referred to as " the magnificent Enlightenment swindle." Perhaps this reference point is best understood in contrast with that which it replaced, the authority of "the Church," the Scriptures, the testimony of the Spirit, and any other form of tradition as authority. The slogan "Question Authority" is a 'gift' of the Enlightenment. The *Cogito* is Descartes' answer to the need for certainty, for an absolutely indubitable foundation for human life and thought. But how could that be? Simply because this *Cogito (ergo) sum* statement is claimed to be self-referential, self-fulfilling, and self-attesting or authenticating. It *gives* what it says with certainty as it *happens* in the experience or consciousness of the one uttering/thinking it. Try it yourself and you will see; it is not a difficult exercise nor does it require any special philosophical training. Thus, you see (?), it is as certain as can be, and that is what Descartes sought. Then, based on such axiomatic certainty as well as an implicit faith in "deductive logic" (following the way of geometry), other certainties can be derived.

Notice, though, the human context of this Cartesian quest of which the *Cogito (ergo) sum* was the answer. Descartes was a very human person, and a rather devout Catholic at that, whose purpose was not to overthrow the Church, but rather to demonstrate the existence of God and the human soul beyond the skepticism of his day. Indeed, Descartes claimed to be demonstrating the truth of Romans 1:20, that is, that "everything that can be known about God can be made manifest by reason drawn from a source none other than our own mind" (Med. §2; p. 45).

Nonetheless, the method Descartes chose was to doubt everything that could be doubted until he found something indubitable with which all would be forced to agree by the evidence of experience itself. To get a feel for the human situation within which Descartes found himself (by his own life circumstances as well as choice of method), it is worth the effort to quote him at some length. Many of the modern themes against which postmodernism is objecting arise from these citations, as well as give us the opportunity for genuine human sympathy with both the modern and the postmodernism projects.

Descartes' First Meditation begins this way:

> Several years have now passes since I first realized how many were the false opinions that in my youth I took to be true, and thus how doubtful were all the things that I subsequently built upon these opinions. From the time I became aware of this, I realized that for once I had to raze everything in my life, down to the very bottom, so as to begin again from the first foundations, if I wanted to establish anything firm and lasting in the sciences. But the task seemed so enormous that I waited for a point in my life that was so ripe that no more suitable a time for laying hold of these disciplines would come to pass. For this reason, I have delayed so long that I would be at fault were I to waste on deliberation the time that is left for action. Therefore, now that I have freed my mind from all cares, and I have secured for myself some leisurely and carefree time, I withdraw in *solitude*. I will, in short, apply myself earnestly and openly to the general *destruction* of my form opinions.
>
> Yet to this end it will not be necessary that I show that all my opinions are false, which perhaps I could never accomplish anyway. But because *reason* now persuades me that I should withhold my assent no less carefully from things which are not plainly *certain and indubitable* than I would to what is patently false, it will be sufficient justification for rejecting them all, if I find in each of them some reason for *doubt*. Nor therefore need one survey each opinion one after the other, a task of endless proportion. Rather—because *undermining the foundations* will cause whatever has been built upon them to fall down of its own accord—I will at once attack those principles which supported everything that I once believed (§17-18; emphasis added).

Moreover, the Second Meditation begins as follows:

> Yesterday's meditation filled my mind with so many doubts that I can no longer forget about them—nor yet do I see how they are to be resolved. But, as if I had suddenly fallen into a *deep whirlpool*, I am so disturbed that I can neither touch my foot to the *bottom*, nor swim up to the top. Nevertheless I will work my way up, and I will follow the same path I took yesterday, putting aside everything which admits of the least *doubt*, as if I had discovered it to be absolutely false. I will go forward until I know something certain—or, if nothing else, until I at least know for certain that nothing is certain. Archimedes sought only a *firm and immovable* point in order to move the entire earth from one place to another. Surely great things are to be hoped for if I am lucky enough to find at least one thing that is *certain and indubitable*. ....
>
> But [even if] there is a deceiver (I know not who he is) powerful and sly in the highest degree, who is always purposely deceiving me […] he can never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I shall think that I am something. Thus it must be granted that, after weighing everything carefully and sufficiently "I am, I exist" is *necessarily true* every time it is uttered by me or conceived in my mind (§24, 25; emphasis added).

Here, then, is the *cogito* as the answer to the dilemma of finding something that can be known for certain beyond the possibility of doubt!

At this point I would be curious as to your response to this situation. Did you know this kind of concern was behind modernism? And postmodernism's objections to modernism? I suspect you have some rather profound objections of your own to this Cartesian modernism. And yet, this Cartesian project has profoundly shaped Western culture for almost 400 years.

Notice the following:

a. The *cogito* is a *statement* (a proposition); that is, a language-event becomes the foundation of certainty, knowledge, science, even truth itself, etc. This is a language-event which is entirely subjective, from within the *pure* solitude of the thinker. The *reference* is entirely turned inward; we might say there is no outside.

> Postmodernists object that language alone is not an adequate reference point. They charge the modernists with being "logocentric." "Pentecostals," on the other hand, may also wish to give a prominent place to "the Spirit" as well as "the Word."

b. The *cogito* is a happening in the *present;* Descartes only claims that it is true "while I am thinking it." This creates what has been called the "Cartesian anxiety," because the "whirlpool of nothingness" [=nihilism] threatens the modernist when not thinking.

> Postmodernists have therefore characterized Western philosophy/metaphysics as the metaphysics of *Presence*, claiming that the present alone (as conceived and experience by Descartes) is not an adequate foundation. We might join the postmoderns with our own concerns regarding the significance of the past (works of God, and the faith in such accomplished works) and the future (eschatology, teleology, hope, etc.).

c. The *cogito* replaces previous sources of certainty, assurance, etc., specifically for the Reformation, the *Scriptures* (language), the assurance of faith, and the source of final authority as understood (e.g.) by the Westminster Confession of Faith, i.e. the Spirit speaking in the Word of God; CVT, the self-attesting Christ of the Scripture, etc.

> Postmodernists disagree regarding "authority," some refusing to grant any authority which is not answerable to human reason (and thus holding to [ultra]modernism), others discovering some form of "justice" as a non-deconstructable. Regardless, postmodernists agree that the Cartesian "ego" (isolated, autonomous, etc.) is "a deceit," "a swindle."

Here are 8 consequences of this Cartesian/modernist project, followed by 8 postmodernists "themes":

CONSEQUENCES OF DESCARTES' PROJECT

1. *DOUBT* becomes the approach vs. faith; doubt is not far from the S*uspicion* ("Masters of suspicion" [Nietszche, Freud and Marx], "hermeneutics of suspicion") which characterizes a lot of postmodernism;

2. The *SELF*'s experience of "clear and distinct" is the standard of certainity (subjectivism is born);

3. A *SUBJECT-OBJECT DUALISM* is set up: what is "inside" vs. what is "outside" (and lots of other dualisms) with the attendant problem of how to overcome this gulf/gap between;

4. The *PROPOSITIONAL JUDGMENT/STATEMENT* and its *TRUTH* is grounded in the consciousness of the subject/ego as that subject is understood within the above *subject-object dualism*; that is, the sense vs. the reference of a language form takes priority;

5. Many other *DUALISMS* are either generated or affirmed, e.g., the soul-body dualism;

6. With these dualisms comes the challenge to find some form of *UNITY*;

7. The *SELF* of the *Cogito* is (a) "as *empty* [a kind of nothingness] as it is certain"; (b) is *disembodied* (due to soul-body dualism →Marcel, Merleau-Ponty, etc. attempt to readmit the body into philosophy); (c) is *alienated* from "the world" (vs. belonging to the world); (d) dependent upon itself for certainty of existence and value of its own existence ("while uttering/thinking the *Cogito*");

8. Philosophy is disengaged from theology, and a kind of gnosticism is born at the root of existentialism and nihilism.

In response to these consequences postmodernism has entered upon a deconstruction or retooling of these problems inherited from modernisms. The following 8 themes can be recognized.

POSTMODERN "THEMES"

1. The *other* vs. the Cartesian "self", especially the others who have been excluded, marginalized by the modern system, just as all but free, males were marginalized by the Greek form of democracy. But what "others" does postmodernism favor? That, I'd say is the reason there are so many postmodernism-*s*: so many "others" were excluded by the dominant "modern" traditions. For example, some of the "others" surfacing in prominent postmodern literature include the face of other person, text as other (but not an "object"), institutional/cultural forces, powers, structures (Marxism), as well as "the other" within us: the unconscious (Freud) , the deceitful heart (Nietzsche), etc. Language as an other is almost a personified form in a lot of postmodernism. Thus, I'd say one way to characterize *postmodernism* is as an *ethics of hearing* "the other", how to hear, how to listen.

2. A *FORM OF UNITY* which overcomes the dualisms of Descartes and modernism, while preserving the differences (thus *différance* of Derrida, differential matrix of Deleuze, being-in-the-world & the ontological difference of Heidegger, etc.). This "form of unity" is not simple, not self-same, not purely given in presence, not closed in on itself, is always already divided, etc. (vs. Descartes' *ego*). My conviction is that this "form of unity" is and must be Trinitarian;

3. The other of presence/consciousness is "honored": *ABSENCE*, the unconscious (whether cultural, social, economic, political or personal), etc., is explored in various forms, where "absence" does not mean strict negativity, nothingness, etc., though "*nihilism*" is never far away;

4. *SUFFERING*, passion, pain is given a voice vs. the passionless, tranquil, self-possessed *ego* of Descartes; this is often linked with the marginalized as oppressed; even including "the *Crucified*" (in Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida, etc.);

5. The "*IMAGE*", as a form of dependent other (vs. self-dependent *ego*) comes forward in various forms: illusion, delusion, dissimulation, the imagination, the aesthetics, etc.; personally I find much of value here with regard to developing the human as "*image of God*";

6. The other of/than scientific prediction, planning, technological control is recognized; thus "mystery," the uncalculable, the non-mechanical, the non-methodical, the *PLAYFUL*, etc. This is often close to, if not identical with (in some, like Polanyi) the *Personal*, even in science;

7. *GIVENNESS* vs. self-generated (of the *Cogito*) is acknowledged: e.g. *es gibt* (Heidegger); symbol gives rise to thought (Ricoeur); the text gives (Heidegger, Gadamer, Derrida); language has been a major focus of this givenness, including even scientific language, but especially *poetic*, literary language (as the other of the Cartesian scientism); regardless the Cartesian form of the proposition (S is P) as grounded in subjectivity consciousness has been severely critiqued (as logocentrism); "*Grace*" is a word which occurs (Heidegger);

8. *OPENNESS* vs. self-closedness (closedness on the self; openness to the other); this includes openness in time = to the future = HOPE (in Ricoeur, McLaren, Freire, e.g.).

V. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Rightly understood, that is from a stance of confidence in our Lord as "the Solid Rock," postmodernism can well serve the missionary task of our Lord's Kingdom. **First**, it can alert us to certain (merely) "western ways" of thinking and being that are more indications of an unwanted conformity to this world which is passing away than enduring eternal qualities. **Second**, postmodernism can loosen up our ways of thinking by giving alternatives which challenge more traditional ways, as well as help to enable us to listen to non-Western (even non-Christian) voices. This has to do both with our personal and with our institutional ways of being and doing things. **Third**, postmodernism can assist us in searching our lives, letting the Lord search us (Ps. 139), as well as giving others in the global Body of Christ voice to speak to us in ways that call us to repentance and into the light of that fellowship which cleanses and transforms (1 John).

Further though, my readings of postmodernism encourage a deeper affirmation as well as a more personal appropriation of that which our Lord has given us. As such I am also more deeply persuaded about the truth of and enabled to proclaim to the nations the unsearchable riches of His grace and glory. Rather than being threatened, my faith is tested and refined through the fires of postmodernism.

In particular I offer the following initial thoughts as the beginnings of a Christian reply to postmodernism, some preliminary indications of "the way forward," still as a sketch: [[sorry, I ran out of steam and figured I should send this anyway.]]

1. LOVE

*Here Levinas's concern for the other/Other seeks it's fulfillment in Love of God and neighbor as fulfilled and modelled and enabled by Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

**The "Other" of the West; partnership; listening; humility

**Renewal of the "deaconate"

*the attention to "the given" (Heidegger, Derrida) finds its ture meaning here with the love of God which gave... (Jn. 3:16); grace, the gift, giving is thematic in both Heidegger and Derrida;

*the centrality and ultimacy of the Personal, even interPersonal (in science, in philosophy [I heard this week that Baudrillard recently has turned to personalistic categories]);

*the form of unity which acknowledges both identity and difference is, I think, "rooted and grounded in love";

*letting the other in, in fact recognizing that the other is already in (as with various forms of postmodernism), I'd also "ground" in love (as well as some "postmodern" form of anthropology); here we have the "Body of Christ" texts to guide us (we are [already] members of one another!);

*the sacrificial quality of love has been highlighted (quite explicitly) by Derrida's reading of Heidegger;

*here I'd also want to include the "covenantal bond" of God with us (= not dead!) in Christ, by the Holy Spirit.

2. HOPE

*This is the big category for Ricoeur and for the critical school, most explicit in the critical pedagogy school (McLaren, Freire [whose latest book is Pedagogy of Hope];

* God is with us (now) and as promise (yet to come): presence and absence (as promise); the already/not-yet responds to a lot of postmodern concerns (though not all, nor does it

respond to all aspects of "absence").

3. FAITH

* Here we have Derrida's primordial affirmation, the engagement with its "bond of faith" which deconstruction cannot defeat;

*There is also much here with regard to Heidegger, though not developed in this course (hinted at only);

*Also in Ricoeur.

4. JOY

*in response to the attraction of "Dionysius" (Is the Crucified vs. Dionysius of Nietzsche altogether a strict distinction and a fair statement of the dilemma? Is "the Crucified" as target Nietzsche's venom "the Crucified" of the Bible? I'd say, in part, yes; but in part, no, but rather the product of Christendom. I think "the laughing revival" is, in part, a response to some of this.)

*With "joy" comes a concern for "freedom," psychological, physical, social, cultural, etc.

5. PEACE

*Here shalom has much to offer with its "wholism" (contra the fragmentation and despair of lots of postmodernism);

6. JUSTICE

*reality of "sin" (e.g. Heidegger's Nazism) is to be recognized;

*righteousness of Christ fulfills the law (develop this "fulfills" as both satisfies and completes/consummates;

* the way Caputo outlines it, it seems to me postmodernism is looking for a justice "without law," at least the law which is unjust and/or oppressive, condemning, etc. In short, a justice which is not at odds with mercy and compassion and forgiveness and restoration, etc., or as the NJB translates "righteousness": "saving justice."

7. MERCY/COMPASSION

*the **suffering/crucified Savior** (Is. 53), the sympathetic high priest;

*righteousness of Christ is apart from the law (this is really KEY);

*biblical concern for the marginalized, oppressed, etc. (Caputo's "diasters").

8. PARTICULAR CONTRIBUTIONS

*on gender issues (cf. Balthasar);

*man as image of God responds to many issues, including especially transcendence;

*the written word is central in Derrida/deconstruction/hermeneutics, etc. (also Postman's assessment); here our understanding of Scripture as Word of God is extremely pertinent;

*thinking as "thinking God's thoughts" in Spirit and Truth (Word);

*destruction of idols/the works of Satan, etc.; "the refuge of lies" (Is. 28:15-18ff)

9. REDEMPTION sums up a lot of this...

*as re-storation, cleansing, "exorcism";

*under the sign of the cross (to re-place postmodern "under erasure"; this "drives" the relevance of the cross to the heart of language);

*the meaning of suffering is focused here;

10. THE RE-

Recall that Caputo's heteromorphism vs. heteronomy was summarized in terms of 2 types of re-'s:

*re-lease, re-petition, re-turn (turn back, circle, etc.)

*re-turn (send back to the other), re-gard, re-spect, re-sponsiveness.

Here re-demption might be reconsidered and not just philologically. This is best left cryptic here.

11. WORD

*Theology of the Word of God has much to offer here

*postmodern text theory has much to offer to Christian theology as well: to translation theory, theology of the Word, reading/literacy theory.

12. THE WORD AND THE SPIRIT

*Differential Matrix, *différance*, dvoika, etc.

*Evangelical/Pentecostal: "the 'line'"

13. RENEWAL OF CULTURE

*Science and mathematics: "number"

*Economics: the gift and the exchanges of Love

*Ecological Policy and Life Style (stop criticizing the left/green and see the point)

*Institution and Spirit

14. SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST

VI. POSTSCRIPT: POSSIBILITIES AND DANGERS

Such a renewal of discipleship—some would want to call it radical/extreme discipleship, but are there really degrees?—offers possibilities of profound theological renewal as well. This is the danger, for here one will likely (re)formulations that offend those for whom orthodoxy has been long since well formulated and established. But radical renewal will not hold any human formulations as sacrosanct…nor does the best of orthodoxy claim that such is the case. But what if the Trinity, or the Person and Work of Christ, or justification, or the form of church life, etc., were to be reopened for discussion? Likely those engaged in such projects will operate "underground" for some time. The "keepers of orthodoxy" are judged to be both not safe and not even really very Christian: some of our friends and family, and some of those who "are something" in our evangelical subculture of stars and heroes, may well be among those who

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[i] **MissionPrep** © adapted from Training Management Corporation (TMC), *Doing Business Internationally: The Cross-Cultural Challenges,* Seminar and Coursebook (Princeton, NJ, 1992).