

Title: Post-Modernism Goes to Church – Talk #2

Text: John 17.17

Theme: The influence of post-modernism on education

Series: same as title

In an article entitled, “New church reaches out via Web”, the Detroit News, on May 29, 2008 did a story about a new church that is attempting to get started here in Macomb Township. The novel thing about this church is that people of the community are being encouraged to vote on the name of the church. Why, because according to the leader, “We want a name that encompasses who we are and that portrays our philosophy.” (so far, so good) Then he goes on, “to make faith current again.” (assumes what? That faith is not current). Now, I am making an assumption here that this article accurately reflects all that the leader said, and that is not always the case. So, my assessment may not be accurate, but the article itself serves as a great illustration to the point of this series. Since the goal of this new church is to design a church that fits the community, then let the community determine what the name should be. So, follow the logic.

The name of the church is supposed to reflect the purpose of the church.

The purpose of the church is to reflect the community. (therefore)

The community picks the name of the church.

I am assuming that this pastor, has a true desire to reach people with the gospel. But, what he is proposing will eventually undo the very thing that he is setting out to accomplish.

The church has to confront the culture with the gospel. The culture is decaying. But he says, “Culture is constantly moving and changing and often, faith gets left behind.” “People were walking away from faith because they thought it was irrelevant. But, what I think is irrelevant was the methods.”

Later on the pastor says, that he wants to make church fun – especially for children. “Our goal is to make this the best hour of every kid’s week, that they’d be dragging their parents out of bed.” “It’s the opposite of what happens.”

Here is the philosophy.

- 1) Identify your target audience (young families in Macomb)
- 2) Find out what they want.
- 3) Design your organization around them.
- 4) Get them to come.
- 5) Give them a reason to come back.

Every thing is man-centered. “We’re custom designing it to make it fit this community.” The customer determines the message, the method and the success. This format is not new. This has been going on for decades. You want a commitment to fun? There is

nothing serious about this? It is religious Disneyland. There is no life and death to this. But, what I found interesting was to see how he used the word “faith.”

“We want ...to make faith current again.”

“...faith gets left behind.”

“People were walking away from faith...”

What is faith? Is it a verb? Is it a church? Is it a set of beliefs? Is it a feeling in life?

Or is it intentionally vague, because if your target audience is post-modern, and post-modern people don't like definitions and are suspicious of authoritative statements, and if truth is something that each group creates for itself when it talks, then you can't speak clearly about faith.

We are told by some cultural philosophers, that we are living in a post-modern era, as opposed to the modern era. The modern era was from 1550 to 1945. Post-modernism began after that. My point in this series to help college students understand what is going on in the educational world, and for them to know how so many churches are being reckless with the faith in an attempt to be “relevant.” My warning is that when you seek to be relevant, you have admitted that your message is not, and that you have no confidence in the gospel. You betray the fact that you have to jazz it up and make it appealing. And when you do that, you marginalize it. Just as this young leader made so clear, methods are king, message is secondary.

College students, if you go away for college, you need to find a church to be part of as soon as you can. Bible study groups on campus are helpful, but they do not replace the church. You need to be careful about the church you select. But, my concern goes much deeper than that. This church is influenced by our culture. The day will come, when I may be tempted to stray in terms of my message and philosophy or, you will be moving into positions of leadership in the church and you need to guard the gospel. Guarding the gospel involves not only protecting it from obvious denials of it, but also protecting it from the subtle things that nibble away at the edges.

The church is always vulnerable to the thinking of the world. We have to guard against that. What is so moronic today, is that church leaders are not only being told that if we imitate the world we can reach the world, we are told that we have to imitate the world to reach them. But, what if the world does not believe in God? What if the world does not believe in absolute truth? How do we imitate that? The church has made a major error in trying to imitate the world in order to reach it, a point I will major on in two weeks. Tonight, I want you to understand a little more about post-modernism and how it affects our educational system and then do a little analysis on it. Since Post-modernism does not like objective definitions it is a bit of a challenge to define this, but I think that that seeing the difference between Modernism and Post-modernism helps. Tony Jones has attempted to describe the differences between the two. In many ways you can see how postmodernism has reacted to the weaknesses of modernism.

Modern Values

Rational: A key Enlightenment emphasis was on the adequacy of human reason to comprehend universal truths, and this primarily is achieved through science and the scientific method.

Scientific: So strong has been the belief in the superiority of science to any other discipline that scientism (the belief that only what science tells us is true and reasonable, is in fact true and reasonable) has become deeply embedded in our cultural mind-set. Scientists have been the high priests of this worldview. Even God can and should be studied scientifically.

Unanimity: Communities tended to be homogenous, not multicultural. Religious options were few, even for dating (certainly not Catholics with Protestants).

Exclusive: Most Americans agreed with the Judeo-Christian worldview, at least in terms of morality.

Egocentric: Modern philosophers stressed the importance of the self. In ethics, that stress focused on the autonomy of the self. Culturally, this view gave birth to the name the “Me” generation for the Boomers, with an emphasis on self-fulfillment.

Postmodern Values

Experiential: Post-moderns want to experience things rather than just read or hear about them. For example, they want to experience interactive video games, or high-adventure vacations.

Spiritual: While popular interest in spiritual things waned under the influence of modern science, today spirituality is in! And people are willing to use innovative means to try to be spiritual.

Pluralistic: Spirituality takes on many forms, some of which have nothing to do with believing in God. Others will want to know who or what you mean by “God.”

Relative: The emphasis on pluralism leads people to think that “all faiths contain elements of truth and any religion is a perfectly good way to express your spirituality.”

Altruistic: Here, Jones notes an important paradox: Millennials seem to be even more “consumeristic” than their parents, yet they also highly value giving away their time and resources.

Individualistic: With the heavy emphasis on self-fulfillment, modern marketing efforts targeted the individual consumer.

Functional: The stress in modern architecture and technology has been on usefulness to serve a purpose.

Industrial: The goals of the industrial age were “efficiency and material bounty,” and machines were highly valued for their ability to contribute to these goals.

Local: People’s interests were largely local, despite transportation improvements. Youth group overseas missionary trips were “virtually unheard of,” and communication with missionaries took place via “snail mail.”

Compartmentalized: One’s life and character at work could be separated from life on Sundays at church. We could live segmented lives. People did not practice what they preached in all areas of life.

Relevant: Make the gospel relevant to people’s daily lives. Be seeker-sensitive.

Communal: In response to the emphasis on self, postmoderns are returning to the family and community, but in “untraditional ways such as cohousing.” TV shows such as “Survivor,” “Big Brother,” and “Friends” capitalize on this interest

Creative: Here Jones observes that “Gen-Xers and Yes are known for the aesthetic sensibilities.” Beauty for its own sake is highly valued.

Environmental: In response to exploitation of the earth’s resources, students are concerned about the environment and its longer-term viability.

Global: Jones puts it best when he writes: “With no major wars or economic depressions to unite us, students believe they’re citizens of the world, and their loyalties may be stronger to the entire human race than they are to nations. CNN and the Internet only strengthen this conviction.

Holistic: Integrity in *all* aspects of life is very important. Postmoderns are *rightly* suspicious of those who live segmented, compartmentalized lives.

Authentic: Be real. Be full of integrity in all areas of your life. Jones puts it well: “Today, the younger generations respond [to appeals to relevance of the Bible to our daily lives], ‘Don’t tell me how to apply this Bible passage to my life. You don’t know anything about my life. Just tell me what it really means. I’ll decide how to apply it.’”¹

¹ Chart taken from Truth and the New Kind of Christian, by Scott Smith.

Postmodern thinking is based on several key concepts:

- 1) Although a “real” world may exist, we cannot know it as such (and)
- 2) The only way we know anything about this “real” world is by our talking about it in the language of our community. (but)
- 3) We cannot know the essence of language, for that would be to know something as it really is. Instead there are only languages-in-use in specific times and places. (thus)
- 4) Our talking about reality shapes and “makes” it what it is for us – we “make” our world(s) by the use of our language(s) within our communities. (furthermore)
- 5) Meanings are not some universal matter, either; they too are constructions made by the use of language within each community. (finally)
- 6) Christian postmodernists agree that these points are true of the church, such that even though we say that Jesus is *the* truth, there still is no way within history to prove it as such.

With this in view, here is how post-modern thought is influencing our universities and other vehicles of education. Within the educational environment, post-modernism has not completely won the day. For example, take the arena of Natural Sciences.

In the hard sciences, such as chemistry, physics and biology, Darwinism is the view. In spite of its so many fatal flaws, it is championed and preached as absolute, objective truth.