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# TIDINGS

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## *The Rector's Reflections*

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In previous *Rector's Reflections*, I have written briefly summarizing *Premodernism*, *Modernism*, and *Postmodernism*. Over the past two months, I began to develop these world-views in a deeper manner. More specifically, as we continue the process of re-building Christ Church, understanding Postmodernism is of the essence.

### MODERNISM

Last month I explained that as time elapsed, the interests and discoveries of the Renaissance pertaining to humanity grew. This led to an unbridled confidence in human potential. Further, this unbending optimism meant that humankind could harness the natural innate capacity of being human and create the good society. With humanity possessing all the inner virtues and intellectual capacity to pursue ultimate reality, Renaissance supporters became more secular. Fundamentally, what did this mean?

First, the familiar motto, "*homo mensura*, 'man is the measure,' reflected. . . [an] unrestrained confidence in man's capacity to judge things

without any reference to a God who transcends him." Putting it another way, the essence of human existence for Moderns rests with the material realm, not the supernatural. Though a large number of Renaissance propagators continued to be orthodox in faith and practice, many eventually denied major tenets of Christianity. Kenneth Latourette explains:

"They took joy in their critical faculties, and especially in challenging what had been accepted in the Middle Ages. They poured scorn on scholasticism and the school men. . . . While paying lip service to the Christian faith, they tended to rule out God, the need of redemption, and the incarnation, and to ignore life beyond the grave. Often they flaunted Christian morality."

Second, with "God [being] eclipsed," human knowledge rested heavily upon the Scientific Method as the principle means of discerning and obtaining knowledge and truth. The rationalism of Modernism upheld the right use of logical/sequential reasoning and correct

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application of learned inferences. Moreover, when universally distributed correctly, these “firm facts of reality” would inevitably secure moral achievement and humanitarian progress.

Third, Modern thought evolved into an intellectual bias known as the Enlightenment. The specifics of the Enlightenment, interestingly enough, “varied significantly from the Enlightenment of one nation or period or school of thought to that of another, so that ‘no definition of the Enlightenment fits all the men usually assumed to belong to it,’ much less all the cultures in which it appeared on both sides of the Atlantic during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.” In fact, the various views represented within the Enlightenment were often not mutually agreeable. However, the Enlightenment found expression in several key notions: “A commitment to reason as the proper tool and final authority for determining issues. . . . Stress on nature and the appeal to what is ‘natural’. On the one hand there is widespread interest in and respect for what natural scientists, using empirical methods, were discovering about the natural world. . . . a widespread acceptance of an idea of progress. . . . Rejection of the authority of tradition.”

Finally, Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh give an excellent summary of the major characterizations of Modernism when they share several thoughts attributed to John Dewey. They write:

“In *Reconstruction in Philosophy* Dewey described the spirit of modern life in terms of four changes from the pre-modern period in Western history.

First of all, modernity is no longer preoccupied with the supernatural, but rather delights in the natural, the this-worldly and the secular. Secondly, instead of the medieval emphasis on submission to ecclesiastical authority, “there is a growing belief in the power of individual minds, guided by methods of observation, experience and reflection, to attain the truths needed for the guidance of life.” In the third place, the modern period is characterized by relief in progress. Dewey puts it this way: “The future rather than the past dominates the imagination. The Golden Age lies ahead of us not behind us.” Indeed, “Man is capable, if he will but exercise the required courage, intelligence and effort, of shaping his own fate.” And fourthly, “the patient and experimental study of nature, bearing fruit in inventions which control nature and subdue her forces to social use, is the method by which progress is made.”

We’ll focus on Postmodernism next month.

Faithfully in Jesus Christ,

*Greg +*