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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.

### **POSTMODERNISM**

The Postmodern era is eclectic in nature. More specifically, one central focus or main guiding tenet is absent from Postmodernity. Thus, it is an erroneous assumption to declare that Postmodernism can be easily and concisely defined. Instead, various themes and theories collectively characterize the Postmodern ethos. Middleton and Walsh explain:

“We could say that postmodern life is like a carnival. Unlike classic theater, in which one show is going on, postmodern culture ‘seems like a carnival with a never-ending array of sideshows.’ There is no center to this production. Unlike even a three-ring circus, this carnival

offers only the clamor of multifarious sideshow hawkers calling out for our momentary attention. They do not seek our commitment in any ultimate sense; they only want to entertain and titillate us with the weird and wonderful worlds they are peddling. And, of course, there is nothing heavy or serious about this. The heavy seriousness of classical theater and the heavy-handed domination of modernity are replaced by the lightness of the postmodern carnival. As Karl Marx insightfully put it more than a century ago in *The Communist Manifesto*, ‘all that is solid melts into air’.”

In this Postmodern era, there are three words that help to define the present age: global, pluralistic, and secular. What is meant by *global*? It has been said that we live in a global village. People are able to relate to one another as never before. The world is getting smaller. The ability to communicate in ways never experienced in human history has resulted in the unavoidable reality of many diverse ideas

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and behaviors being constantly present. Leith Anderson writes this concerning globalization:

“During May 1990, I visited the People’s Republic of China. I had thought of this nation with more than a billion people as backward and isolated, but I learned how interconnected our world really is. We flew into Beijing on a brand-new Boeing 747 made in America; we flew out of Beijing on an equally new Soviet tri-jet. In Xian they told me that Adidas sneakers are ‘out’ this year but Reeboks are in. And in Guangzhou they keep up with current events by watching Dan Rather and the CBS Evening News broadcast from Hong Kong. . . . With World War II, the speed of globalization accelerated. Unprecedented numbers of American GIs had seen foreign countries. This exposure led to international business and international missions, and the emerging age of modern technology and global communications expanded. Jet planes shrunk travel time and cost to a fraction of what it had been a hundred years earlier. These phenomena increasingly fed on each other until today no culture can remain isolated.”

Another factor of American culture is *pluralism*. We live in a multi-cultural society which has also resulted in numerous views and opinions being made known. In other words, the diverse people groups each contribute a wide variety of belief systems to society. Richard Kew and Roger White put it this way:

“The religions of the world are jumbled together as never before. However unstable it has been at times, the old religious consensus in America of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews is now

giving way to new players. Immigration, intermarriage, and conversion has brought Hindus, Buddhists, and Moslems into our population in increasing numbers, not to mention the growth of the quasi-Christian sect like the Mormons, and eastern groups like the Unification Church and the whole New Age movement.”

The third item that helps define the present age is *secularism*. The historical Christian values which have served as the foundational philosophical undergirding of America no longer are the prevailing thought. Relativity permeates contemporary culture’s value system. George Barna shares some thought providing insight concerning the influence of relativity:

“Most Americans believe there is no ‘right’ faith; that all of the world’s major faiths teach the same lessons; and that all people pray to the same gods, no matter what names they use for those deities. Baby Busters are actually the first generation in American history in which a majority of those who are seeking a religious faith to embrace are starting their spiritual journey with a faith group other than Christianity. . . . One likely result of this openness to all faiths is that Christianity appears poised to lose ‘market share’ in the coming years. More and more people, enticed by the narcissistic or feel-good focus of other religions, will abandon Jesus Christ in favor of faiths that seem more in tune with their needs. . . . Diversity and tolerance have clearly edged past the boundaries of political ideology and racial acceptance and invaded the religious realm. For the most part, Americans consider the major faith

groups interchangeable. Each faith may have unique language, traditions, icons, and ceremonies, but we view them as unified in their constant push to achieve equivalent outcomes via similar paths of inquiry and activity. . . . Indeed, given people's underlying assumption that religious faith exists for the personal benefit of the individual, it is only natural for them to assume that defining, organizing, and practicing spirituality in ways that satisfy their personal needs is completely legitimate. One of the chief struggles facing the Christian Church in the days ahead will be to persuade people that the blending of disparate religious beliefs and practices into a customized, impure version of Christianity is illegitimate."

On the other hand, in some respects, Postmodernism is a response to Modernism's elevated emphasis on reason. For example, Postmodernism has moved "beyond scientism (the claim that science is the only valid method of acquiring knowledge and discerning truth)." Further, for Postmoderns, reality and the meaning of human existence cannot be reached from simply a rationalistic perspective. Postmoderns "have lost the faith that sustained modernism, the faith that human reason could deliver answers and find solutions to the great questions of human life." Join me next month as I begin discussing several trends that have surfaced in Postmodern society.

Faithfully in Jesus Christ,

*Greg +*