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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 several months, I began to develop these world-views in a deeper manner. More specifically, as we continue the process of rebuilding Christ Church, understanding Postmodernism is of the essence.

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."

With reason being supplanted in prominence, several trends have surfaced in Postmodern society. First, Postmoderns do not believe in

an objective reference for defining words. Alister McGrath states: "Postmodernism is generally taken to be something of a cultural sensibility without absolutes, fixed certainties, or foundations . . . Language does not refer to anything." Nevertheless, words might have some meaning in a cultural context, yet, at the same time, there is no "absolute truth that applies equally to all cultures." Truth, as a result, is only subjective; it does not exist outside the individual.

Moreover, the essential meaninglessness of words creates for Postmoderns "a purely pragmatic instrumental view of language. There are no true propositions." With this being the case, Postmoderns deny any universal story for human existence. Instead, there are only individual constructed stories which are equal in value. Timothy Phillips and Dennis Okholm explain:

In contrast to modernity, postmodernism repudiates any appeal to Reality or Truth. The very attempt to propose totalizing

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metanarratives that define and legitimate Reality are denounced as oppressive. Once modernity's claims to universality and Reality are dissolved, the relativism of Richard Rorty and Stanley Fish emerges. For what remains is only the autonomous Self . . . The Self is the source of truth and reality. Human knowledge is *constructed* by the whole person (the unconscious and subconscious, as well as conscious reason). What one chooses does not matter; that one is free to choose is all that matters. As a result, postmodernism is suspicious of all metanarratives that seek to name, define, legitimate and arbitrate social institutions, roles, identities and practices. There are no controlling rules or norms for society; not even God has that right.

Similarly, key central questions of life have no definite answers. Whatever works for a person or certain group is accepted as being equally valid. Since there is no one legitimate perspective regarding life's considerable questions, several views coincide in Postmodern thought. Heath White shares four acceptable Postmodern options:

There is, for instance, *nihilism*, which says that we cannot resolve basic questions because there simply is no right answer. Or a postmodern might

advocate *relativism* in either its radical or cultural guises: relativism is the idea that truth varies from person to person (radical relativism), or from society to society (cultural relativism). A variation on this, one that is very common among postmoderns, is *constructivism*, which says that basic questions cannot be resolved because truth is made, or constructed, rather than discovered. Different people or different societies construct different truths; hence, their truths are different, so of course not everyone is going to agree on them. Or there is *pragmatism*, which says that truth is just whatever helps us get around life. Whether you are getting around in life, however, depends in part on what you aim to accomplish, so truth will differ between people or between cultures that aim to accomplish different things.

Please join me next month as I continue discussing Postmodnerism.

Faithfully in Jesus Christ,

Greg +