POSTMODERNISM CRITIQUED[1]

MARKS OF POSTMODERNISM:

1. **THERE IS *NO OBJECTIVE TRUTH*. Truth is *created*, not *discovered*.** This philosophy came from Friedrich Nietzsche the famous German atheist philosopher who popularized the "*God is dead*" teaching. **A consequence of this dramatic change of thinking wherein everyone "*creates their own truth*" is that without truth, *POWER* is everything.** "Truth then becomes only a matter of human convention or social construction. So '*culture shapes ideas*' instead of the concept that '*ideas have consequences.*' (and) when there is no objective truth then there is no core character." (Guinness) **So it becomes ok to lie, cheat, exaggerate, etc., to achieve your goals.**

2. **"*ALL* CULTURES ARE *EQUAL*, EACH IN ITS OWN SPECIAL WAY."** i.e. "***Multiculturalism***", "***Pluralism***" & ***TOTAL tolerance* of *anything*, regardless of how perverted.** "Pluralism is at the center of Postmodernism. Example: The story "*The Lottery*", as an example of this trend.

3. **THERE IS NO *"AUTHORITY."* If there is no absolute truth, then every individual determines for himself what is true or false, right or wrong.** "You have the elevation of the autonomous self as the sole judge of life and reality."

4. **LYING IS NO LONGER LYING**. Even if you lie, you can maintain that you are speaking "*your own personal truth*" or speaking for the "*larger truth*." Example: "*I, Rigoberta Menchu*."

5. **NO JUDGMENTS CAN BE MADE ABOUT ANYTHING**. "***Thou shalt not judge*"** becomes the *summa bonum* (comprehensive dictum or rule) of the day. Total tolerance of anything, immorality, corruption, brutality, crudeness, etc.

6. **CONSEQUENTLY…"THERE CAN BE NO '*REFORM*' OR '*MORAL PROGRESS*.'"**

7. **"THE PROMOTION OF *IMAGE* OVER *CHARACTER*."** We are in an image-conscious society. Image is everything. Character is unimportant. Example: Bill Clinton.

8. **"THE GLORIFYING OF *POWER*."** Liars like postmodernism, since it gives them tacit approval to lie. In a world with no absolutes, the only thing that matters is power.

9. **"THE RESORTING TO '*VICTIM-PLAYING*' and '*IDENTITY POLITICS*.'"** e.g. Feminists, homosexuals, transgenders, minorities—*and even those who aren't minorities*—portray themselves as victims in order to get what they want and achieve their goals. **This has become pandemic**.

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[1] This is an abbreviated synopsis of a much fuller paper of mine on Postmodernism. All of the main points and the vast majority of this material contained here is taken from "*Time for Truth"* by Os Guinness (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, Michigan), copyright 2000. Additional supplemental material is taken from the following sources: "*No Place For Truth, or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?*" by David F. Wells (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1993); "*Dining With the Devil-The Megachurch Movement Flirts With Modernity*" by Os Guinness (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1993); "*Slouching Towards Gomorrah*" by Robert Bork (Harper Collins Publishers: New York, NY, 1996, 2000); "*The Scarlet Thread of Scandal-Morality and the American Presidency*" by Charles W. Dunn (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers: New York, NY, 2000); and "*The American Leadership Tradition-Moral Vision From Washington to Clinton*" by Marvin Olasky (Simon & Schuster: New York, NY, 1999). Compiled by Rev. Mike Edwards, Goroka, Papua New Guinea, c. August 2003 (revised & updated January, 2012, St. Vincent, West Indies & Aug 2014 & May 2018, Madison, Ohio), bolding, underlining & italicizing added. Email address: pastor@bbcmadison.org

10. **SURPRISINGLY, AN "INORDINATE DESIRE TO *PLEASE PEOPLE* IS A CHARACTERISTIC OF THE POSTMODERN PERSONALITY."** People in power soon realize that **it's all about "*people pleasing*"** i.e. making people think that the leader cares about them, understands their problems, feels their pain, etc. But it's all just a façade, in order to manipulate them-a ruse, a sham, in order to get others to do what the leader wants them to do.

RESULTS OF POSTMODERNISM ON LIFE AND CULTURE:

1. **"*SLOPPINESS* IN DRESS"** In offices and businesses around the world this is seen more & more.

2. **"AN INCREDIBLE *COARSENING OF SPEECH* (especially) OVER THE PUBLIC AIRWAVES."** This is an undeniable fact that needs no documentation. The language on music CD's, TV, talk radio, as well as in movies, etc., has become unbelievably filthy & vile.

3. **"A SIGNIFICANT RISE IN *SCIENTIFIC MISCONDUCT AND FRAUD*."** There is a great deal of this occurring. The reason: when it doesn't matter whether you lie or cheat, all that matters is power, prestige, position & attention.

4. **"AN INCREASED '*LITERARY LICENSE*' IN JOURNALISM."** Stories in the media are often "*created out of whole pieces of cloth"* i.e. they are totally false and completely made up!

5. **"THE NEW '*LIBERATION MARKETING*' IN ADVERTISING."**

6. **"A MAJOR "RISE OF MISREPRESENTATION AND ACCOUNTING GIMMICKS IN *BUSINESS*."** For instance, the multi-billion dollar collapses of companies such as "*Enron*" and "*WorldCom*", due to accounting fraud and deceit.

7. **"*POLITICAL CORRECTNESS* RUN AMUCK."** For instance it has become almost impossible for anyone in the West to publicly criticize homosexuality without being labeled a "*bigot*" and be accused of discrimination and "*homophobia*." Likewise, anyone who dares criticize Islam will be labeled Islamophobic. And should anyone—*especially a male*—dare to question the right & ability of a woman to engage in *any* role or task—from pastoral ministry to military combat—is to invite the wrath and scorn of feminists worldwide—not to mention that of the mainstream electronic and print media.

8. **"*LITERARY* THEORY CHANGES."**

9. **"*LEGAL* THEORY CHANGES."** The O.J. Simpson trial & President Bill Clinton's impeachment hearings were about "*Dream Teams*" of lawyers willing to do anything and say anything short of getting themselves arrested, in order to win.

10. **"*LIBERTY WITHOUT ORDER* i.e. unrestrained, total freedom & license.** The freedom envisioned in the past by America's founding fathers, was something they called "***Ordered Liberty***." **It was not total, unbridled, uncensored freedom to do *anything* a person felt like doing!** Instead, it was a freedom or liberty *within the confines of moral standards and constraints*. As John Adams well stated, "*Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other… The only foundation of a free Constitution is pure Virtue, and if this cannot be inspired into our People…They may*

change their Rulers, and the forms of Government, but they will not obtain a lasting Liberty."[2] However today nearly all moral standards have been jettisoned, so there are no boundaries on "*liberty.*" So you can have a crucifix upside down in a jar of urine in an art museum in America and it is called "*art*" and is not allowed to be removed-*even if a vast majority of the people want it removed and have said so via a vote or referendum!* Ditto voter referendums on homosexuality, etc.

11. **INDIRECTLY**: "**A POWERFUL '*GATEKEEPER*' INFLUENCE**." i.e**. the *MSM* (*Main Stream Media*)** control most of what is seen and heard by the vast majority of people in most countries, and they determine what is news and what isn't, and what will and will not be covered. So a white policeman killing a black man who had just robbed a store and the lawless repercussions which follow (& continue to follow) runs 24/7 for months in the media, while the coverage of the hundreds of murders/year which occur in Chicago (nearly all of which are black on black killings) is hardly reported on at all, even though Chicago is the previous president's hometown!

CONSEQUENCES of THE ELIMINATION of REAL OBJECTIVE TRUTH:

1. **IN REGARD TO ETHICS**. **WITHOUT ABSOLUTE TRUTH, THERE CAN BE NO REAL ETHICS or ETHICAL BEHAVIOR**. The Bible and the Judeo-Christian heritage that has come from it, is the basis of law and morality. Business schools such as the Harvard Business School are now attempting to teach ethics without an objective basis. **It does not work.** Ironically there are more ethics courses being taught than ever before, yet less ethical behavior seen than at any time in our history. Richard Dawkins & other famous atheists are at a complete loss to find a credible basis for moral ethics without God and the Bible for a basis.

2. **IN REGARD TO CHARACTER**. **WITHOUT ABSOLUTE TRUTH, EVERYONE JUST "PUTS ON A FRONT," A FAÇADE, IN ORDER TO GET WHAT THEY WANT, BECOME ACCEPTED or FAMOUS, or ATTAIN POSITION or POWER.** The whole emphasis shifts to "*projecting the right image or impression*", instead of being yourself, being a person of integrity, and standing for bedrock principles that govern your life. Politics is full of this, but so are other disciplines.

HOW CHRISTIANS SHOULD RESPOND TO POSTMODERNISM:

1. *BOLDLY CONTEND THAT THERE IS SUCH A THING AS ABSOLUTE TRUTH!*

a. **THE BIBLE DECLARES THAT THERE IS SUCH A THING AS ABSOLUTE TRUTH**!

- Psalm 40:11 – "*Let Thy truth preserve me*"
- Psalm 100:5 & 117:2 – "*His truth endures to all generations*"
- Psalm 108:4 – "*Thy truth reaches to the clouds*"
- Psalm 19:7-9 – "*The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul, the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart…the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether*"
- II Cor. 6:4, 7 – "*But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God…by the word of truth...*"

[2] Quoted in "*Essential Liberty*" (Publius Press: Chattanooga, TN, 2009), p. 121

- "Eph. 6:14 – "*Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth…*"
- III John 4, 8 – "*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth…We therefore ought to receive such* (i.e. faithful evangelists & preachers)*, that we might be fellow-helpers to the truth."*

b. **<u>THE BIBLE STATES THAT IT IS A REPOSITORY OF ABSOLUTE TRUTH</u>.**
- John 17:17 – "*Sanctify them through the truth, Thy word is truth*"
- II Tim. 2:15 – "*Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*."

c. **<u>JESUS CHRIST CLAIMED TO BE *THE VERY INCARNATION* OF ABSOLUTE TRUTH</u>.**
- John 14:6 – "*I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father but by me.*"

d. **<u>JESUS CHRIST'S WORDS ARE ALSO DECLARED TO BE ABSOLUTE TRUTH</u>.**
- John 1:17 – "*Grace & truth were realized through Jesus Christ*."

e. **<u>THE HOLY SPIRIT GUIDES INDIVIDUALS INTO ABSOLUTE TRUTH</u>.**
- John 14:16-17 – "*And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but you know him; for he dwells with you…*"
- John 16:12-13 – "*I* (i.e. Christ) *have many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come*."

2. <u>*FORCE POSTMODERNISTS TO THE LOGICAL END OF THEIR HUMANISTIC THINKING.*</u>

<u>Two examples from Cal Thomas</u>:

"**In…1982 I lectured at the University of California, Santa Barbara campus**. Among other points, I attempted to make a case **that a nation which does not have a proper base for its moral absolutes** ('*inalienable rights*' as Jefferson called them) could not long survive as a free nation. **I said that the base for those absolutes in the United States has been the Judeo-Christian ethic.** When it came time for questions, a rather self-assured student got up and asked a question that went something like this:

'*I'm a 3.8 average political science major and I don't see any reason at all why we need the Bible or the Judeo-Christian ethic in matters pertaining to a nation or to public policy*.'

Since he was rather cocky in his question, I decided to mimic him in my reply. '*Is that right, Mr. 3.8*," I said. "*Tell me, what is to prevent me from taking out a gun right now and shooting you to death because I don't like the tone of your question?' 'Well, there's a law against it*,' he replied, still cocky.

'*What if I was able to get enough people together who agreed that the law should be changed and that I was perfectly within my rights to shoot people who ask cocky questions? On what basis will you be able to tell me that such an act is wrong?*" The student fell strangely silent and sat down.

'*You see*,' I said, somewhat more gently, '***without a firm set of inalienable rights which, by the way, are inalienable because they are endowed, in the words of Jefferson, <u>by our Creator</u>****, we are left only with* ***majority rule*** *to determine what is right and what is wrong. Our history and the history of the world is replete with the corpses of those who have fallen to the excesses of majority rule*.'"[3]

"**The other incident occurred on the campus of James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia**… A young woman student approached me following a debate in 1982. The student asked virtually the same question:

'*Why do we need to invoke the Judeo-Christian ethic in order to have a free nation?'* I replied by asking her a question. '*Why can't you shoot your neighbor if his dog messes up your yard?'* Her answer was unlike any I have ever heard. '*That behavior is not part of my socialization process*,' she said. '*Your what?'* '*My socialization process. My parents used a socialization process that does not allow for that kind of behavior*.'

'*All right*,' I said, '*but what if the dog is your dog and he messes up your neighbor's yard and your neighbor has a different socialization process, one that allows him to shoot you?* ***On what basis do you make a moral claim that what he is about to do is wrong?***' The student stood there and could not answer. It appeared no one had ever challenged her logic to any extent whatsoever."[4]

<u>An example from Os Guinness</u>:

To properly understand this example one must read the brief fictional story of "*Dr. Emerson Eames, distinguished professor of philosophy and warden of Brakespeare College, Cambridge (and) one of his brightest students, Innocent Smith*." By G. K. Chesterton.[5] **While the story is fictional, it "is not simply a flight of Chesterton's imagination, but the fruit of his own life.** In 1892 Gilbert Keith Chesterton was an eighteen-year-old student at the Slade School of Art in London. Far from the stiff-upper-lip primness of the caricature of Victorianism, the end-of-the-century world of art was swirling with decadence, cynicism, and pessimism. Chesterton himself was also drawn to the macabre and the occult. In other words, his world was remarkably similar to our postmodern one. But however much such pessimism and cynicism was the rage and however drawn to it he felt, one thing kept Chesterton back: What he described later as a 'thin thread of thanks,' a sort of 'mystical minimum of gratitude.' Bursting with gratitude for the gift of life, he was waking up to wonder as he set out to search for a philosophy that would allow him to be realistic and yet 'enjoy enjoyment' too. **In the course of his search Chesterton not only came to faith; he came to faith by becoming an arch-skeptic about skepticism, a radical disbeliever in the fashionable disbelief.** He found the skeptics and cynics not skeptical and cynical enough. Far from stopping short of tough questioning, the faith Chesterton came to was the other side of such questioning—and all the stronger for having gone through it."[6]

"Chesterton's journey in life and his story in "*<u>ManAlive</u>"* highlight an effective response to skeptics and those who insist on a radical relativism that is impervious to traditional claims to truth. Curiously, his approach is exactly the opposite of what most people try to do. Advocates of traditional views of truth often respond to relativists in the same way as English or American tourists traveling in France who speak their English more slowly and loudly. <u>Similarly,</u>

[3] Cal Thomas, "*Book Burning*" (Crossway Books: Westchester, Illinois, 1983), pp. 29-30.
[4] ibid, pp. 30-31.
[5] See for instance, Os Guinness, "*<u>Time for Truth</u>*" (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2000), pp. 89-92.
[6] ibid, p. 93.

proponents of traditional views commonly underscore the objectivity of truth in ever more earnest and labored ways. And then, when they fail to carry their point, they mask their frustration by issuing dire warnings of the consequences of disagreeing with them. The result is mutual incomprehension and a stalemate.

"Chesterton shows us another way—in fact, two other ways—from an honored tradition in Christian witness that is too often neglected today. For when it comes to belief and unbelief, no argument in the world is unarguable. Every argument either has been or will be put forth by someone. **But while all beliefs appear consistent to those who believe them, they always have one of two problems: They are either a) *constricting* or b) *contradictory*...** Then comes the strategy used so well by Chesterton and the best protagonists of faith. The wilder and more dogmatic an argument is, the more important it is to argue against it on its own grounds…we will explore two ways to do this, as put forward by Peter Berger as the two best ways to counter radical relativism.

"**The first effective strategy for countering relativism on its own grounds is negative: '*Relativizing the relativizers.*' By this is meant *applying to skeptics the skepticism they apply to others, thus pushing them out toward the negative consequences of their own beliefs***. With a good cigar and a glass of port, Chesterton's professor has one attitude toward life and death in his comfortable apartment, but quite another when hanging grimly to the buttress while staring down the barrel of a gun. When turned on him, his philosophy of life is cold comfort.

"As Berger points out, **the strategy rests on two assumptions. The *first* is that relativism and skepticism entail a hidden double standard-the relativism is inconsistent and incomplete**. All too often relativists relativize others but not themselves. They relativize the past but not the present. They pour the acid of their relativism over all sorts of issues but jealously guard their own favorite ones. In the film "*More Than a Minute*", a student named Quincy remarks to a classmate after a lecture by an atheistic professor who had asserted that there is no such thing as absolute truth, "***For a guy who doesn't believe in absolute truth, he sure is dogmatic!***" Hugo Chavez of Venezuela was a classic example. He outspokenly stated that for his country it was "*Socialism or Death*!" Yet the source of the enormous amount of money available to him at the time, which he used to influence the Caribbean and South America for socialism/communism, was ironically, being supplied to him by *capitalism*, the vast majority of it from his capitalistic selling of oil to a country he regularly excoriated: the United States!

"**The strategy's *second* assumption is that consistency and clarity are linked**. The task of encountering relativism, Berger writes, is to '***see the relativity business to its very end***.' Press relativism to its consistent conclusion and the result is surprising. Far from paralyzing thought, relativism is itself relativized, the debunker debunked, and what emerges is an almost pristine realization of the importance of truth."[7]

"**Wasn't this the assumption behind the prophet Elijah's challenge to Israel in the ninth century B.C.?** If Baal, and not Yahweh, was God, then follow Baal, he cried as he offered the prophets of Baal the first opportunity to verify their god. With the bulk of the people sitting uneasily on the fence between God and Baal, Elijah knew that pious calls to return to God would have fallen on divided hearts and deaf ears. He had to mount the challenge on their grounds. (see I Kings 18)
"For if YHWH is God, then Baal is not, ***and the fastest way for the people to see it was to push them toward the false faith that was bound to be falsified by reality***. The disproof came first and cleared the ground for the proof, for with the false falsified the true could be verified. '*The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!*' was the people's conclusion with heartfelt conviction.

[7] Guinness, pp. 94-95.

"The same logic runs down through the centuries. **Jesus said, '*By their fruit you will know them*'—not by their seed.** If you had spoken to the prodigal son the day he left home, would he have listened? If you spoke to him the day he hit the pigsty, would he have needed to? '***See where it leads to***,' St. Augustine advised in dealing with falsehood. *Follow it out to 'the absolute ruddy end*,' C.S. Lewis remarked with characteristic Englishness. ***Push them to 'the logic of their presuppositions***,' Francis Schaeffer used to say. …Sir Alfred J. Ayer…was candid about the failure of his (own) principle: '*Any iconoclast who brandishes a debunker's sword should be required to demonstrate it publicly on his own cherished beliefs*.'"[8]

"**The lesson is simple: While no argument is unarguable, *some thoughts can be thought but not lived***. So we should never stop halfway in dealing with skepticism but follow ideas uncompromisingly to their conclusion. **When heads collide with the wall they will have reached the limits of their position and will be open to reconsider**. In this sense, reality is what we run into when we are wrong, for when we are right, we don't run into it. '*There are times*,' Vaclav Havel wrote, '*when we must sink to the bottom of our misery to understand truth, just as we must descend to the bottom of a well to see the stars in broad daylight*.'

"The sobering fact… (is) that ***Ideas have Consequences***…Because the skeptics' view is finally untrue, it is in their interest to discover it in good time. But even if we care so little that we say and do nothing, life itself will most likely push the skeptics out to face reality anyway, and the final outcome may be far less pleasant. **Put differently, all people at some point behave true to their beliefs. Sooner or later they will act on the assumptions they truly hold and reap the consequences**. We often say that people don't 'live up to their beliefs,' but it would be more accurate to say that, in a crunch such as temptation, they switch to other beliefs and live up to those instead. We do live by our beliefs. The question is, which ones?

"**Now although someone's beliefs and assumptions may not be true and do not describe reality, *they will still drive their behavior***. So if someone doesn't believe in truth, count on him to lie. If someone says there are no objective facts, expect her to be careless with facts to further her own interests. If someone explains everything by referring to evolution and the '*selfish gene*,' be sure that at some point he will be extremely selfish on behalf of the fitness of his own survival. If someone describes newborn babies as '*replaceable*' and of no more value than snails, you can bet she will become an advocate of '*involuntary euthanasia*' (i.e. murder-*mwe*), and so on.

"**The principle holds true for nations (also), for ideas have consequences**. Differences make a difference. ***Behavior follows beliefs* as surely as thunder follows lightning**. **What starts in the studies will end in the streets.** When it comes to postmodernism, the stunning fact is that we do not have to predict its consequences—we have already seen the influence of its core ideas on history. Do we really imagine there can be no consequences a second time around?"[9]

POINT OUT "*THE SIGNALS OF TRANSCENDENCE*." "By this is meant the strategy of drawing attention to the contradiction and yearnings within people's beliefs that point beyond those beliefs toward entirely different possibilities…'pointing out signals of transcendence' is positive because it points toward the positive conclusions of true aspirations, unnoticed before."[10]

(NOTE: THIS IS A *WORKING PAPER*. THIS POINT & STILL INCOMPLETE AT PRESENT)
[May 2018]-*mwe*

[8] ibid, pp. 95-96.
[9] ibid, pp. 98-99.
[10] ibid, p. 101.