Christianity in a Postmodern World

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

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The Crisis of Modernity

There is widespread recognition that Western culture is in deep transition. The environmental crises have forced recognition that past policies no longer work, so that a practical change is required. But the cultural transition long antedated the public one and has a life of its own. The ideals that moved previous generations no longer move us. Whereas not long ago only a few visionaries and seers questioned that Western culture of recent centuries represents a major advance in comparison with all else that has transpired and is transpiring on the globe, now many are profoundly skeptical of its claims to superiority. The rhetoric of "science," "medicine," "education," "democracy," and "human rights" rings hollow in our ears, even when we have nothing better with which to replace it (Cobb "Two Types", 149).

This description of the state of Western culture is an accurate summary of the crisis of modernity. Modernism, as a philosophical paradigm, is crumbling away under its own weight and giving rise to new paradigms that are shaping world culture. The new era has yet to define itself so we are left in between--in the postmodern era.

The birth of the modern era was marked by the scientific revolution and the age of Enlightenment (Moore, 546). These ideas ushered in a split from the classical and ancient ways of understanding the world. In the seventeenth century, Descartes reshaped philosophy by focusing on the individual and Newton brought the scientific method as a way of proving and explaining phenomena (Cobb "Two Types", 150). Later, in the eighteenth century, the modernistic paradigm was contributed to and enriched

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by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant. Kant's philosophy linked all human understanding to the five physical senses (Smith, 656). Then, in the nineteenth century, Saint-Simon added the philosophy of Positivism. This philosophy held that all phenomena could be proven by science and that the scientific world view was the true way in which things were ordered (653).

From its beginning in the seventeenth century, the modern intellectual program has continued on into the twentieth century shaping the ways in which people think and order the society around them. Harvey Cox, a twentieth century social critic, has defined late modernity as centering around these five pillars, sovereign national states, science based technology, bureaucratic rationalization, the quest for profit maximization, and secularization and trivialization of religion (Cox, 183). Cox calls an airport terminal the complete symbol of modernity. Here is where we hold passports to other nations that remind us of the sovereignty these nations hold. We also see the gleaming advances of science and technology. The Rational Method is at work in the scheduling and handling of flight traffic and passenger traffic. Also present is the dominance of profit seeking, airlines competing to book more passengers and make more money. Finally, religion is scant or non-existent. The closest many airports come to religion is a flight insurance machine.

The ideas of modernism have begun to be attacked as we realize that the methods and paradigms are no longer holding true to our experiences. The science itself has followed the
scientific method only to find that the Positivistic world view is not definitive. Kant's philosophy has been broken by the discovery of phenomena beyond our physical senses. Ultrasonic noise and infrared light cannot be physically sensed yet we have knowledge of its existence through the advances of science. We are forced to admit that there may be other phenomena that we do not recognize or understand because our five physical senses do not perceive them. Also, Albert Einstein's theory of relativity has shown that things are not always as they seem. Physics has now moved beyond Einstein and is discovering even more baffling exceptions to the modernistic framework. Philosophy and culture have also begun to shift and the move of the postmoderns is underway.

**Defining the Postmoderns**

Perhaps the most discussed term among societal leaders of the late twentieth century is *postmodernism*. It seems that the very term *postmodern* has lived up to its critique of modernism, making it a truly postmodern word and causing us to be frustrated in finding a single definition. In general, postmodernism is the deconstruction, or disproving, of the societal concepts of modernism that have been considered universal and absolute. This deconstruction is not to eliminate the influence of these ideas, but to free our thought from the limitations they impose on us (Spretnak, 4). The very idea of the existence of an absolute definition of symbols is rejected, leaving us struggling with
ambiguity and uncertainty. Therefore, in the postmodern searches we never arrive at a final truth but only bring more insights into the complexity we have (Cobb "Two Types", 156). With this frame of reference, we can only describe the current definitions of postmodernism and develop a working definition relevant to our discussion.

Several scholars have identified postmodernism as a rejection of epistemic foundationalism (Nuyen, 66). This is the modernist idea that there are bits of knowledge that are absolute and serve as the foundation on which all knowledge is built. Postmodernism replaces this with a system of paradoxes which holds contrasting bits of knowledge in tension and builds upon the understanding of this tension (Sweet, 32). Postmodernism also involves the consistent deconstructing of the early modern intellectual program of the Enlightenment as developed by Newton and Descartes (Cobb "Two Types", 150). This program has led to the division of knowledge into unrelated disciplines and individualism that focuses our thought on ourselves. Postmodernism rejects the categorizations and binary opposites these divisions fostered (Nuyen, 67). Instead of approaching a problem as having two sides and an either/or situation, we should approach it as a both/and/also situation that acknowledges the opposites and allows for other ideas to enter into the discussion. Postmodernism also tries to reunite knowledge with the pragmatic (Evans, 214). This keeps social theory and philosophy from being merely ineffective intellectual games, but
allows them to be the base for structural change within the society. Postmodernism also reorients society toward the preservation of the positive advances of liberal tradition and technology while maintaining a balanced ecology and adequate level of human participation that keeps society together (Spretnak, 4). As a community, we cannot allow the divisive nature of the modernist program to destroy our society and environment and expect to persist into the future.

Two major forms of postmodernism have been developed from the two major interpretations of modernity. The aesthetic interpretation has led to deconstructive postmodernism which focuses around the deconstruction of symbols such as those in art and literature. The epistemic interpretation of modernity has led to the development of process postmodernism which looks at the way we perceive things and deconstructs the divisive modern perceptions (Moore, 546).

Deconstructive postmodernism, also called eliminative, attempts to overcome the problems of modernity through an anti-modern approach (Griffin, x). This anti-modern approach, developed and carried out by leading French intellectuals such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, revolts against the ideas of the Enlightenment era. In the nineteen sixties, the perception that the Western mind was self-destructing led many to revolt against the standards of the time. This concept of self destruction has entered into the deconstructionist's analysis of modernism, but has had much more undercutting consequences. The
deconstructive postmodernism has no faith in our mental ability
to construct a world in theory or in practice (Cobb "Two Types", 151). This means that we simply cannot conceive of a coherent
organization of society without limiting ourselves. One way of
looking at the deconstructive postmodernism is the "onion model."

The deconstructive model is something like peeling an onion. As one sees through the meanings by which we have been conditioned to live at one level, one finds another, and another level of meaning. But if one could see through them all, there would be nothing left (Cobb "Two Types", 153).

This model shows the penetrating nature of deconstructive thought. This brand of thought breaks through the limitations of our current assumptions but only finds other assumptions to eliminate. If we ever deconstructed all of our limitations, we would have nothing to build on.

The deconstructive postmodernist also contends that there is no reality other than linguistic reality (Cobb "Two Types", 156). Deconstructionists see language as a set of symbols that have had some meaning or meanings placed upon them. These meanings are to be eliminated until the text is all that exists. At this point, "[t]he meaning of a text (and the truth of one's interpretation of it) does not depend on the presence of the author (nor is it tied to the presence of a referent)." (Nuyen, 66). Simply stated, this implies that the meaning of something is not dictated by the author, but by the reader's interpretation. Likewise, the reader's interpretation is not the absolute meaning because the author or another reader may have developed an
alternative meaning. Ultimately, the only absolute that exists is the text itself; no objective meaning exists because all meanings are tied to an interpretation. This style of interpretation was applied to Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*; it became a rallying point for the prison reform movement. Foucault wrote the text as a history of madness and civilization, but it was interpreted as a sharp critique of the mistreatment of prisoners. Foucault shifted his "meaning" to allow the text to be used in this movement showing that the meaning of a text is only relevant to how it is interpreted.

Process postmodernism, also called constructive, holds a much more hopeful picture for human thought. It starts with a deconstructive phase to prepare the way for new ideas, but ends in a constructive fashion (Cobb "Two Types", 152). This approach is different from the deconstructive approach inasmuch as it offers some end other than nothingness. Process postmodernism is pluralistic in that it does not encourage replacing one method with another, but contrasting diverse methods and understanding them. This includes deconstruction but concentrates on the positive lessons that can be drawn from the contrasts rather than "peeling the onion" (Cobb "Two Types", 155).

Process postmodernism draws its name and genesis from the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead as presented in *Process and Reality*. This philosophy was developed in the nineteen twenties, but was largely ignored until its revival in the nineteen sixties (Cobb "Two Types", 152). This philosophy
sees time not as a smooth flow, more like a motion picture. The time of process thought consists of episodes, or frames, that together in sequence appear as a continuous flow. However, unlike the motion picture, the "frames" of time are not still but dynamic (Cobb and Griffin, 3). John Cobb, a prominent postmodern theologian describes process postmodernism as

draw[ing] its model of change from Whitehead's account of creativity: the many become one and are increased by one. We are constituted for good and ill by the many ideas, practices, and movements of the past. What we become in every moment is largely a result of the way they enforce themselves upon us or within us. Yet we are not merely the product of this past. We are vouchsafed also a vision of what can be made of that past as it is integrated with new possibilities derived from God. We are called to become what it is thereby made possible for us to become. How we respond to that call is our decision. ("Two Types", 153-

The imagery of unification that "the many become one and are increased by one" brings to our conscience a model of wholeness and equality that modernism undermined with elitist and nationalistic impulses. Process postmodernism replaces these impulses with a rich understanding drawing from global culture and philosophy (Cobb "Two Types", 153). Keeping with this unity, postmodernism also attempts to reunite knowledge that has been separated into unrelated fields by the specialization of the modern mind (Griffin, x). Also, Cobb's description acknowledges the influence of the past on our lives but does not tie that influence with the destiny to repeat the past. He gives us the
option of acknowledging input from a higher source to add to our vision for the future.

Along with rejecting the modernity's fragmentation of knowledge, process postmodernism also rejects "its individualism, its materialistic atomism, . . . its nationalism, its Eurocentrism, . . . and its tendency toward nihilism" (Cobb "Two Types", 152). These aspects of the modern era divide us against each other and focus our attention on ourselves. Eurocentrism and nationalism have caused us to oppress those races and cultures that did not arise in the European Enlightenment. Not only has this approach rejected much of the knowledge these cultures developed and valued, but it has fostered resentment among these cultures when Western intellectuals tried to claim these discoveries. The controversy surrounding the celebration of the voyage of Christopher Columbus is evidence of the danger in Eurocentrism. The discoveries and achievements of racial and ethnic minorities are devalued if we consider Columbus to be the discoverer of the Americas. Resentment grows among Native Americans when the societal and cultural achievements of their ancestors are portrayed as uncivilized, having traits that had to be conquered by the Europeans such as Columbus. This resentment even leads to racial tensions. Similarly, materialistic atomism, or being concerned for ourselves, has caused us to ignore the immediate and long term consequences of our greed on other people around the world. Many third world nations are being economically and environmentally exploited for the economic
growth of the first world nations (Bello, 36). This not only damages the world environment and economy but limits the freedom of the people in these nations.

Process postmodernism does keep some aspects of the modernist era such as self-criticism, the concern for the personal, commitment to human freedom, and the freedom of inquiry (Cobb "Two Types", 152). These are the liberating factors of modernity which were aspired to, but limited to, those who were of the privileged class, race and gender. The self-criticism and freedom of inquiry will always keep us looking at what we have and deconstructing the restrictive elements of it so we can continue to add new ideas to the mass of understanding. Similarly restrictive language keeps us from orienting ourselves within events. This makes language pragmatic in the sense that restrictive language is "bad" while that which allows for acceptance is "good" (Cobb "Two Types", 156).

Deconstructionists and process postmodernists have often been viewed as opposites and very critical of each other. Often the leading intellectuals fall prey to the temptation to argue with each other in an either/or fashion where one tries to proselytize the other criticizing. Deconstructionists have said that process postmodernism is not a true postmodernism because it is connected with positive value in human thought (Griffin, xi). Deconstruction's main thrust lies in that we cannot construct a conception of the world without limiting ourselves, and process postmodernism creates a conception based on the tension of
paradoxes. Process postmodernism sees deconstructionism as hypermodernism in that it only carries modern ideas to their logical end instead of revising them (Griffin xi). Process postmodernism is historically connected to the perception of the Western mind's self-destruction and deconstructionism is simply modernism taking its final course.

This either/or battle is a reversion to the modern form of argumentation and is detrimental to the formation of postmodernism. A few scholars have realized this and switched to a both/and/also model of postmodernism. This model is the best explanation of postmodernism because it practices its own methods and shows that deconstructive postmodernism isn't as opposed to process postmodernism as commonly thought (Nuyen, 17). The model of postmodernism described by these postmodernists includes the undercutting force of deconstructionism with the integrating quality of process postmodernism. This shows that deconstructionism can function as an element of the evolution of thought described by process postmodernism (Cobb "Two Types", 155). This model defines postmodernism as a system in which the limits of the Enlightenment on our thought must be broken down before we can see that differences in ideas can be built upon to form an interconnected and inclusive view of the world.

On this level, postmodernism cannot be regarded simply as a sequel to modernism, as the latest step in the never ending revolt of modernism against itself. The postmodern sensibility of our time is different from both modernism and avant-gardism precisely in that it raises the question of cultural tradition and conservation in the most
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fundamental way as an aesthetic and political issue. (Alexander and Seidman, 371)

With this understanding of postmodernism its effects on social institutions and religion can be examined.

The Culture of the Postmoderns

The postmodern movement has brought many changes to many areas of our culture. Postmodern thought has begun to permeate the lives of people and is now altering the social institutions that modernism built. By looking at the effects of the postmodern movement on the political system, the economic system, and the family, we can better understand the meaning of postmodernism to our culture. The technological approach of the modernist project fragmented our society and culture leaving us with an overriding pressure to conform (Griffin, 9). The rebellion against this pressure has allowed the postmodern philosophy to gain widespread acceptance. The culture of a nation is no longer defined by one description. A pluralism of individuals has brought society to see racial and ethnic pride and diversity as a factor in the identity and culture of a body of people (Elazar, 11). This diversity brings with it a responsibility to accept and understand the experiences of others and to see that your own experience is connected with that of others.

Postmodernism as a cultural movement . . . has a simple enough message: anything goes. This is no slogan of rebellion, nor is postmodernism in fact rebellious. . . . 'Anything goes' can be read as follows: you
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may rebel against anything you want to rebel against but let me rebel against the particular thing I want to rebel against. Or, alternatively speaking, let me not rebel against anything at all because I feel myself to be completely at ease (Heller and Feher, 139).

This 'anything goes' message has radically altered the institutions of our society including political structures, economic philosophies, and the nature of our families. No longer is culture bound to one form of these institutions; it free to consider other configurations.

Postmodern political movements are rapidly changing the nature of our political system. Beginning in the 1970's, people started severing the strong party ties that had dominated voting patterns in the past. The emergence of the independent voter has threatened the two party system ever since (Elazar, 10). The 1992 presidential campaign showed the impact of a voter who is not tied to a political party can change the face of elections. Ross Perot's nineteen percent of the popular vote reflects a decline in party loyalty and dissatisfaction for the traditional national party responses to the current problems our nation faces. Meanwhile both the Democratic and Republican parties are trying to realign themselves with the popular thought of the country because they can no longer count on people voting for them just because they are a party member. The 1992 Democratic convention succeeded in bringing the party together and focusing it toward mainstream thought while the 1992 Republican convention
struggled for unity against a powerful right wing caucus and eventually could not focus for voter support.

The 1970's also brought the importance of the media image to politics. The images the candidates try to build in the media are of perfect and flawless character. When the actual character of the candidates is revealed, it often disappoints voters and diminishes their hope in any government. This loss of hope continues to grow, while at the same time the people expect the President to be able to do more and more to correct the problems our nation is facing (Elazar, 10). This leaves voters looking for something they can never find—a perfect individual who can fix all the problems of the nation without raising taxes.

More and more people who are becoming disenchanted with presidential politics, and realizing that change can only occur if "we, the people," decide to act. This gives the opportunity for the postmodern political movements to gain popularity. Some of the movements of postmodern society are health and anti-smoking campaigns, the sexual counter-revolution, anti-nuclear campaigns, peace efforts, ecological "green" movements, cultural feminism, and educational reform (Heller and Feher, 140). These movements have influenced politics by altering the values that society places on certain ideas. Cultural feminism is postmodern in that it is constantly trying to deconstruct the male dominated culture and create and expand alternate areas where women can develop (Gibbins, 231). Other movements are trying to do the same for other causes. The green movements are trying to create
areas where protecting the earth is important. The health and anti-smoking campaigns are trying to create areas where taking care of yourself is important. All of these movements, driven by personal values, are trying to transcend traditional politics and revolutionize society by changing cultural values (Gibbins, 233).

This sense of dynamic justice is taken for granted in the postmodern era. We are now constantly questioning the justice of one set of values against other sets of values (Heller and Feher, 124). Also, it is no longer a situation where one set of values will win. Like the both/and/also answers of postmodern social theory, the value sets are held in tension with each other and allow us to clearly define the positive and negative aspects of both. Similarly, religion is now an ally of both conservative and progressive politics. Fundamentalist Christianity continues to support a conservative agenda which maintains the status quo while others are experimenting with a variety of interesting combinations of religion and radical politics (Griffin 86). The Roman Catholic Church is supporting liberation theologies and base Christian communities in Latin America that foster sentiment against the economic injustices of the world economy and dictatorial regimes. With the deconstruction of traditional ideological divisions strange looking political groups are forming in developing countries. Until recent years in Nicaragua, Christianity has been an ally with the marxist Sandanista government by supporting the equality and economic independence and justice for their country (Griffin, 88). In the
past, Christianity and marxism couldn't even hold a dialogue because of the either/or mindset of both sides. The openness to a both/and/also dialogue allows both sides to transform from their origins and build on the aspects they agree on.

Postmodernism is neither apolitical or anti-political. However, it does not support any particular political agenda. It allows movements of the "conservative, rebellious, revolutionary, and progressive to exist at once" (Heller and Feher, 139). The interaction of these movements is the place where policy can be built. Postmodern political theory acknowledges that the best way to serve individuals is to serve the communities that form around these varied movements (Griffin, 9).

Much has been written on postmodern political structures but little has been written on the economies these governments must work with. The economic theory has just recently been evaluated and deconstructed by the postmodernists. Modern economic theory was based in the ideas of the Enlightenment era. This rooted economics in an individualism that removed community when it hindered the production of more goods and services. The rise of consumerism has completed a shift in the goal of labor. Instead of the common good of the community, personal gain was now the primary goal. The result was that the importance of community declined whereas the demand for goods and services increased making it possible to produce more. Modern capitalist economics removed the systems of mutuality that assured well being for all and replaced them with competition against each other in order to
raise the total amount of goods and services being produced. Also, work was no longer creative to the majority of the labor force. The Industrial Revolution which began in 1750 was now nearly complete and labor became more and more mechanical as the creativity became confined to the upper class entrepreneur and inventors. This upper class was also the major beneficiary in the economy because they had control of the product after it was made. As a result, the rich got richer and the poor got poorer—weakening societal community even further. It is now widely recognized that the Gross National Product (GNP), the modernist measure of economic growth, does not correlate well with the real economic well being of the society.

There are few definite postmodern economic theories, but general goals and ideas have been published. John Cobb Jr., a prominent postmodern theorist, has said that "[w]hat is needed is a more reflective value-laden inquiry about the economy as a part of the total society" (Griffin 134). This idea of an economy connected and accountable to the society is consistent with the interconnectedness of postmodern awareness. This awareness of the connection between the effects of economy and society have shown us that most of the short term growth of GNP has come at the cost of the long term wellness of the environment and the poor of the society. A more postmodern approach is one that considers the well being of all persons instead of the well being of financial matters. A postmodern economy would contend that human welfare is not the sum of individuals personal welfare but
the welfare of connected communities and therefore the welfare of all (Griffin, 107-134).

No one knows what an effective postmodern economy would look like but it should include many things our current economy is lacking. A long range vision in planning of resource use and other matters should be important. This long range vision would force us to consider the impact on future generations and their environment before doing something to benefit the present time. We have found that the exploitation of the natural resources in our world in order to profit have brought us to an ecological crisis that is costing us more to repair that the short term benefits were. A holistic view of the economy is also a vital portion of the postmodern idea. This holistic approach would force us to consider the interconnecting bonds that are present in our culture when forming economic policy. To many times we do something for the good of one group of people at the expense of another group only to find that the latter group of people become frustrated and cause more damage than the former group benefits. This relationship of groups occurs along racial, class, gender, and ability related identifications. The economy's relationship to political structures cannot be ignored either. A postmodern economy can only be as just and liberating as the political structure that it is associated to. Finally, in postmodern economy, work should not be an alienating experience where we are competing against each other. The danger in the competitive drive is that we tend to turn on our competitor and undermine
them instead of striving to do better ourselves. The postmodern vision is one where work is the creative process in which we co-create the world we live in together— not against each other (Griffin, 117-132).

Unlike economic theory, the impact of postmodernism on the institution of family has received much attention. The ensuing debate over family values in the 1992 presidential election shows just how important the effects of postmodernism on our families are to our society. The shape and character of our families is becoming more and more diverse and many liberating benefits and troubling detriments have been found with every family model. No longer can we consider one type of family to be the model by which all families will be judged.

The modern economy made it's indelible mark on the families of America during the industrial revolution. The family was no longer the foundation for economic success but became a dependent to outside employment. A person could no longer support a family of any type without employment from some employer. This dependency gave employers and companies power over the workers because it could threaten them with unemployment. The industrial revolution also brought the privatization of values. This delegation of values and ethical matters to the personal and private part of society allowed industry of erode the family and strip away its functions. The family was once the center of education and socialization but is no longer trusted with these duties. In fact, the entire family and its concerns were
entirely privatized and were no longer a serious consideration of corporations and government. Families had become a separate part of the society (Griffin, 106). The family was no longer a factor in the political economy.

Rather than the family's exercising a softening influence on the economy, the economy through television began to shape, according to its destructive values, the cultural life of the home (108).

In modern society the family had little influence outside of itself.

The postmodern movement has re-advanced the influence of the family into the public sphere. However, the postmodern view of the family has allowed the family to take many forms that previously were not thought of a family. Postmodernism sees the family as the supporting kinship web that provides the connections a person needs. No longer is the family confined to spousal, parental, or sibling relationships (118). The modern family did not deny the importance of relationships outside of these bonds but did not consider them as important as marriage and birth relations. The postmodern society recognizes that when the relations of the modern family fail a person, other relationships become the primary support for an individual. This allows the definition of family to extend beyond the nuclear family into feminist, gay liberation, and other kinship patterns (Stacey, 270). As these alternative kinship patterns gain acceptance they influence other families to be more just and equity minded. The postmodern era gives hope for a family order
not based on power derived from gender, heterosexuality, divisions of labor, or parenting methods (258).

Under the modernist nuclear family, socialization was perceived as an event of childhood. The postmodern perception of socialization as a continuous process that alters itself through the changing kinship web of an individual. This socialization exposes people to many different value orientations and creates a pluralist value socialization that does not fit an either/or philosophy (Gibbins, 32). The concept of continuous socialization through a changing kinship web coupled with the postmodern family produces a new perspective on society. In this vision we are all related to each other by our kin the systems we have transcended the present to include the past and future kin we share. In short, "society . . . is the family blown large" (Griffin, 118). As people growing up in an society of "traditional" family erosion, new form of family become possible and are in contrast to the old. Change becomes the common characteristic and taking an advantage of the opportunities of the present hold much importance in our society (Gibbins, 113-4).

It is important to remember the postmodern philosophy of the family. The postmodern family is not just another model of family, nor is it a new stage in an orderly progression, but it is an acceptance of the belief that no logical progression exists and that families are what they need to be—support (Stacey, 18). The postmodern movement has re-established the family, as a kinship system, as the fundamental cell of society. This cell is
central to many of the movements of ecological, social, political, and religious significance. To deny the influence of this centrality undermines the importance of the kinship system and therefore society (Griffin, 119).

Postmodern theorist Joe Holland has identified certain ideas and actions that should be recognized as the postmodern family emerges. The "cultural celebration of life as creative communion" should be acknowledged (Griffin, 120). Many in society have lamented over the loss of community in our society. The message this implies is that life necessitates communion with others. This togetherness must also allow us to co-create substantial rewards with each other. It needs to be publicly recognized that "family is the first social expression of this communion" (Griffin, 121). The kinship family that supports us is the product of that vital need for others. This family need not be just spouses, parents, children, or siblings because often when we lose contact with these relations we surround ourselves with others by expanding our kinship family. Work needs to be an "expansion of the familial process to the macro-level [of society]" (Griffin, 121). Our labor needs to become creative again. As stated earlier, the communion of people together needs to be productive.

One method of inspiring creativity is to "experiment in re-rooting work in the family" (121). By founding work in the kinship system we would be creating products and goods much in the same equitable manner we support each other. Many office
settings have become extended kinship settings. When tragedy strikes a worker often their co-workers pitch in to help each other handle the situation. Also, many offices now hold open forums to discuss and critique processes and procedures. These forums allow everyone to become involved in the creation of the products and goods instead of a select group of people specifying job duties and assigning them to workers. Above all, Holland recognizes that a "family criteria for all public policy" must be developed (121). This does not mean legislating the family order but making the support structures of the kinship systems a guiding force in social policy. Not only must we recognize the diverse forms of family but we must also value them. The postmodern movement has brought much turmoil and debate in our social institutions including politics, economics, and family. These changes are showing us that in reality all these institutions influence one another and create the interconnected postmodern world.

Christianity of the Postmoderns

At has become clear that society is in a period of great transition. Postmodern philosophy and social theory have begun to make a great impact on the structures and relations of the citizens of our society. Religion and theology are not immune to this impact and have also entered a stage of transition in the postmodern world. The importance of postmodern thought on culture must be seriously considered and heartfelt if religions
are going to relate to the world in the coming century. This discussion will consider the efforts of Christianity as it reflects on the meaning and aspects of a postmodern Christianity.

In the onset of late-modernism, society became concerned with its decline and began to examine classical philosophy and Christianity. Although it was not the original intent, society critiqued the classics and became aware of the spirituality in the postmodern consciousness (Walsh, 4). What followed was the comprehensive critique of society by the deconstructionists. The limitations of the modernist intellectual project on the people of today were exposed and reconsidered. The spiritual bankruptcy of the modern philosophy had also been exposed and rejected (Walsh, 3). This rejection ran deep because people had begun to recognize the importance of the spiritual in their lives.

The conception of a secular society, existing without reference to any transcendent source and drawing its legitimacy entirely from humanity's autonomous self-determination, [had] begun to loose its appeal (Walsh, 1).

This left the postmoderns with a great paradox. It seemed as if no absolute transcendence could exist but that a need to believe in something beyond themselves was essential to their existence. What the postmoderns arrived at was "not a revival of something in the past but the discovery of a living truth in the present" (Walsh, 4). This was postmodern faith.

This faith is not a sudden reversion to the acceptance of a ideology on which all knowledge was founded, but a belief in the realities of our experiences. The only way to root your faith in
a truth is to understand the experience of that truth in our lives (Walsh, 213). Without experience a person cannot understand the authority of a belief. An awareness of the necessity of experience to understanding can give Christianity a more understanding outlook on other religions and vice versa. This foundation of faith in the experience of Christianity is not so much a "leap of faith" itself as it is a recognition that in Christ we see a supreme example of what we experience ourselves--a desire toward goodness (Walsh, 221). This desire to do what we feel is goodness is what attracts us to the teachings of Jesus which are to perfect our goodness, as well as the belief in Jesus as a savior. This personification of our experience and desires is similar to a neglected aspect of some classical philosophers who used an ideal type to express an ethical system (Walsh, 226). This ideal type was needed because these philosophers saw that no strict code of ethics could be universal. Only later did Plato begin to create the idea of a universal Truth. Now, in a postmodern sense, Christians claim Jesus as their ideal type.

The postmodern faith is also defined in a different manner. Modern faith was mostly a matter of what you believed to be universally true. In an era of no universal truths, some other realization of faith has to be found. Faith has been defined by some as consciousness. Faith as consciousness is a combination of emotion, memory, reflection, and thought (Olson, 49). This faith is a thinking faith that reconsiders what it believes. This is congruent with the constant introduction of new
considerations into the complexity of what we know in postmodern philosophy. Postmodern faith has also been described as a process. This process has been linked with the concept of the spirit making it a shifting and ever changing thing. This foundation of faith in a non-foundation is another of the paradoxes of postmodernism (18). One postmodern theologian, Leonard Sweet, has described faith as not a doing of actions or a state of being but an experience of becoming (Sweet, 69). This view of faith solves the age old debate of faith being works or beliefs by showing that faith is an ever growing, ever changing, living experience vital to the belief in Christianity.

With this postmodern faith, a new awareness of the importance of spirituality in Christian faith has also arisen. This spirituality reflects the deconstruction of the either/or consideration and the adoption of the both/and/also approach to questions and dilemmas.

Postmodern spirituality rejects dualistic supernaturalism, on the one hand, and atheistic nihilism on the other, in favor of some version of non-dualistic spirituality (Griffin, 2).

Postmodern spirituality does not see the history of events as a battle between two supernatural forces under which all mysterious occurrences can be classified. It also rejects the idea of the complete absence of any supernatural. Instead it understands that mysterious occurrences defy dualistic classification and must be considered by themselves as the evidence of some supernatural power. Postmoderns often see religion and
spirituality as a transfer of energy (Sweet, 72). This is much like the experience of the poor woman in the gospels who was healed when she touched Jesus in the crowd (Luke 8:46). Jesus felt the power/energy go out of him when she touched him. This transfer of energy can also be felt among groups. Communities, like individuals, need to remain connected to each other to continue to experience the energy of God. Whereas, the power of modern culture arises from action and manipulating your connections for your own self benefit. The postmodern energy and power is contradictory to the power of the modern culture because it is derived from just being and letting the transfer of energy/power flow from your connection with your Creator (Griffin, 16).

The effects of postmodern thought on spirituality are reviving and redefining aspects of Christianity that have been long neglected. First, a recapturing of the mystic has occurred allowing us to develop a living spirituality (Griffin, 18). This translates into a deep interest in the wisdom literature and the mystery and majesty of God. Throughout the modern era, we were separated from what was spiritual and concentrated on the learning of what could be supposedly proven to be true. That has been rejected in favor of a rebirth of mysticism expressed in the acceptance of meditations as a form of prayer and other forms of creative spirituality.

Secondly, this translates itself into a shift in emphasis from the historical Jesus to the cosmic Christ (19). Theology in
the modern era has concentrated on the search for the actions and identity of the physical man named Jesus who lived nearly two thousand years ago. While this was not a wasted study, it is for the most part finished. Theology now can turn to a consideration of where they see the teachings and actions of Christ today. If Jesus Christ was indeed the "Word become Flesh" (John 1:14) then that Word is still alive and active even though the flesh has gone. Theology is finding the value in exploring the actions of God and the Word/Christ in the various beliefs and religions in the world (Cobb Good News, 37). This respect and connection with other religions and stories of faith is an important part of postmodern Christianity. Through the sharing of these stories of faith we can search for the authenticity of human experience and make possible "difference without domination" (Evans, 219).

Again, this correlates with the postmodern notion that differences should be important, but should not divide. We need to work to understand the authority of the experiences of others. The connection of Christianity with other religions and faiths will also play an important role in bringing the world together in understanding and formation (Sweet, 130).

Thirdly, the rediscovery of the creation mystics of the Middle Ages has begun to occur (Griffin, 20). The tradition of the mystics of Christianity was neglected in theological education and in the modern era has left Christianity without knowledge of its mystic roots based in scripture and social justice. The re-emergence of mystic faith will spur the study of
past Christian mystics such as St. Francis of Assisi and Thomas Aquinas. This also involves seeing God in every aspect of creation. Christian reflection on the environmental movement has led to a new interpretation of the first commands ever given to humans. In the past the command to "till and keep" the garden (Genesis 2:15) has been used to rationalize the domination of the resources the earth has. Now a "green theology" has interpreted this to mean that humankind is to protect and act as stewards or gardeners to creation (Sweet, 19). This understanding of the first commandment has given a boost to the postmodern ecological movement that sees a healthy environment as necessary because all things are interconnected, as well as environmentalism as a spiritual base in the connectedness of all creation.

Fourthly, an expansion of our images of God and a deepening of them to include other possibilities has begun. If God is indeed all powerful, then there is nothing God cannot be. One of the images brought into awareness by cultural feminism is God as mother. God as father has been around for centuries and the image of God as mother has just begun to be explored in Isaiah and the Psalms. The image of God as mother includes a God who gives birth, a God who nurtures, and a God who creates in a loving manner. Another image is God as below, not above. The idea of God being deep within creation and ourselves is as important as the concept of God being above us and watching over us. A third image is that of the Godhead, not just God. The Godhead is the name given to the mystic experience of
experiencing the divinity of God and feeling in total unity with God. A fourth image is that of panentheism (Griffin, 21-24). Simply stated, this is the notion of God being in all creation and all creation being in God. These images of God have been a part of the mystic tradition of Christianity that was neglected and demoted by the postivist expression of Christianity in the modern era.

Finally, spirituality can be seen as a journey. This approach to Jesus in search of a spiritual truth is much like the way the people of biblical times approached Jesus (Walsh, 203). This varies greatly from the religion as an escape from the outside world approach of the modern era. This journey toward a deeper spirituality can never transcend existence or bring existence under control. This is because the whole of reality is always larger than the participant (Walsh, 224). We will never be in complete control or understanding because God is always in control. The mystical journey to postmodern spirituality can be named in four ways, the via positiva, the via negativa, the via creativa, and the via transformativa (Griffin, 26-29). The via postivia is the experience of God in an ecstatic way. A person is filled with awe and amazement when encountering God through this manner. The via negativa is a journey that encounters the darkness of letting go and letting things be. Meditations and disciplines such as fasting often lead us to go in this way. Another way to travel this path is through suffering and pain. Holocaust literature and other stories of life in totalitarian
regimes has led to some of the most insightful images and understandings of Christianity (Walsh, 4). The via creativa is a path of creativity. After the delight of the positive experiences and the emptying out feeling of the negative experiences we are prepared for a rebirth of creativity. We are ready to be recreated by God. Finally, the via transformativa is the culmination of all the paths. It lies in the transformation of ourselves and all society to reflect the compassion of our Creator. This socio-cultural transformation will rejoin the Church with the people and allow the Church to provide creative leadership for the future.

The Mission of Christian Postmoderns

Postmodernism has affected every aspect of society and human life from the governmental structures to the very hearts of our belief systems. The understanding of this impact has been less than widespread among the general populations of society. The mission of the postmoderns is to ensure that people understand postmodernism as something that is happening and not just a topic for the intellectual elite. The mission for the Christian postmoderns is to revitalize the Church and awaken the potential for social justice through postmodern religious action. The Church, even with all its flaws, can be the strongest chance for creative leadership to bring society out of the crisis of modernism (Cobb Good News, 20). This is because of the spiritual
base of the postmodern movement and the willingness to accept what cannot be proven as a foundation for belief and action.

The nature of the Church is also an aspect of Christianity that has felt the impact of postmodern philosophy and social theory. One of the most important aspects of the postmodern Church is that individuality and community are not at odds with each other but require each other (Bellah, 246). This means that in order to become an individual you need the support of others that constantly affirm and challenge you. It also means that community cannot exist without some individuality, a community that does not have differences is impossible. This does not mean that a community is simply a collection of individuals. When a collection of individuals is made there are tensions created by their differences which must be understood and accepted by all. This understanding and acceptance of differences without divisions is the something extra that makes community in the postmodern sense. The Church as a community is recognizing this paradox. Many denominations are struggling with hard questions such as abortion and homosexuality where a great deal of differing opinions are expressed. Yet these communities have begun to learn that it is possible to disagree and still get along and act responsibly toward a solution.

The definition of the Church as a community includes the concept of a people of Spirit and Memory (Shea, 58). This image is used to explain the living relationship with God that the Church has. The experience of living with God as a reality was
triggered by Jesus and continues through the Spirit. The stories and rituals we practice allow us to embody the experience of Jesus then— and Christ now (Shea, 61). The experience of God is what allows us to understand God and set a foundation of faith in something that cannot be proven. If we lose the memory or spirit of that experience we lose the foundation of our belief. Telling about the stories of faith and Christianity is what keeps the memory of the experience alive and talking about the stories helps us understand the ever-changing spirit of the experience. This telling and talking is also what relates the experience to the culture and keeps it relevant and vital not an inflexible dogma or the literal words captured on a page (Shea, 86).

The Church must relate to the problems of and potentials of society in the postmodern era. Christianity can no longer afford to ignore the major questions society is grappling with and allow itself to be privatized (Evans, 220). If the Church decides to sit back and follow where societal trends lead it, it is in great danger of losing any possible impact on society at all. The Church's only importance would be within the private lives of people and not affect policy or planning outside what was personal to people. The process of renewal must begin with the reawakening of the Church to the philosophical foundation for a persons life that it holds and a end to the emphasis on dogma (Walsh, 204). Without the reawakening of the Church, the crisis of modernity will continue and we will culturally wander aimlessly and without vision.
The Church has no small task ahead of it, but it must enter this transformation or risk becoming irrelevant. The spiritual bankruptcy of communism in the Eastern nations was their denial. The bankruptcy of democracy in the Western nations was the privatization of religion (229). The restoration of spirituality needs to be achieved for the transformation of our world out of the bonds of cultural modernism to take place. It has been argued that some cathartic experience is needed to shock people awake to the problems and limitations of the modern era (242). This idea arises out of the experience of those in concentration camps and totalitarian regimes. The writings of the personal experiences of Corrie Ten Boom in Nazi concentration camps and Alexander Solzhenitsyn in the Soviet Gulag show how individuals have been through the bottoming out, or via negativa, and found a postmodern spirituality. Their rediscovery of faith came only after the full immersion in the experience of the lack of faith. They were then reawakened and realized the spirituality present in their everyday lives (Walsh, 4).

How then, can the personal experience of bottoming out be translated into a catharsis for the world? No definite answer exists for this question but perhaps this process has already begun. The beginning of the catharsis for the world could be a realization of the spiritual bankruptcy of modernism that has left us unsatisfied. A step further could be the realization that the structures our society has built have taken a series of revolutions, world wars, and other sufferings to realize that
those structures aren't going to work (Walsh, 11-12). Much more of the crisis of modernity needs to be examined before we realize that perhaps we have bottomed out and are starting to rebuild.

The Church, as an institution of our society and culture, also has begun to rebuild. Currently, the Church is shocked that the modern mindset it has been defending itself against for the past several decades has found itself in decline. As this shock begins to fade the need for creative leadership arises. The Church needs to name the dangers of the present age, claim them as relevant to our spirituality, and frame an alternate vision of how things should be (Sweet, 23). This postmodern Church will recognize that the modern world has bottomed out and is in need of direction and vision. That direction can come from the Church not as resistance to "decaying morals" but as a liberation from the very age that justified the worst cruelty and menace to life on earth (Walsh, 2).

The symbiosis of society, culture, and Christianity in the postmodern era seems to be moving us in the direction of a social action Church. This form of Church would be involved with the concerns of the people as well as providing direction and creative leadership. This form of Church is not foreign to the experience of Christianity. With its roots in the expression of justice that serves as the base for Judaism, Christianity is an active emphasis on the compassion and love of this justice (Spretnak, 159). Therefore, the very core of Christianity should be a compassionate justice, an expression of peace with justice.
The Hebrew word for this concept is *Shalom*. Commonly translated as peace, *shalom* includes the vital element for a lasting peace—social justice.

The social gospel movement of the nineteenth century opened the Church up to active involvement in the public lives of its constituents. Churches supported labor movements for better working conditions and housing reform for better living conditions. Later, in the civil rights movement, the social Church arose again to support equality and justice to the racial minorities of society. The postmodern Church is again opening the possibility of religious public involvement towards *shalom*. It is important that the political and social aspects must be rooted in the values within the souls of the individuals (Walsh, 228). The drive towards *shalom* needs to originate in the spiritual center of the Church and not simply become an add on ministry. Likewise, the drive for equality and justice needs to have a spiritual base to give the desire meaning and direction. Already there is evidence that this is taking place. In 1991, *The Nation*, a secular based journal, reported that nearly three fourths of all persons involved with social change work cited religious motivations (Spretnak, 170). The advances of liberation theologies and base communities in Latin America are also an encouraging sign. Not only are these efforts bringing Christ to the people in a constructive way, as opposed to escapist, but they are challenging those who live in comfort to support economic justice (Spretnak, 172). The liberation
theologies and base communities provide a religion to the poor that allows them to actively work toward better living conditions.

In the modern era, Christianity was seen as something to sanction suffering in this world for riches in the next. Now people can work toward the peace with justice mandated by the scriptures in the postmodern Church. The recent recognition of the effects of liberation theologies by the Roman Catholic Church in the new catechism expanding the meaning of "thou shalt not steal" to include structures of economic exploitation is yet another sign of the transformation of the Church into a postmodern mode. Other religious groups in the United States have begun a "sanctuary movement" to protect refugees who are not granted asylum because they are fleeing from regimes our government is not willing to oppose (Spretnak, 169). These sanctuaries are the result of the Church's realization that not everything our government does is right and that they do have the power to do something to work toward shalom.

The social justice church is not foreign to Christianity; it has just been hidden for a long time. Throughout the modern era, Christianity had been on the defensive to justify its existence. Now, in the postmodern age, we have seen the need for the spirituality that Christianity can provide and the Church needs to understand its mission to provide creative leadership for the coming years.
The Christian in a Postmodern World

Living in the postmodern world will be unlike any other experience we've ever had yet it may make so much sense that many may fail to see just how changed it is from the modern paradigms that have structured peoples lives. After years of defensive action, the postmodern church finds itself in a central position in people's lives (Walsh, 5). The concerned members of this postmodern Church cannot afford to let this opportunity for impact go by. Postmodern Christians will find themselves in the midst of the difficult questions and debates of society and must relate their faith, the basis of their lives, to these questions. This unique witness will allow for the Church to once again have an effective voice in the lives of people. Theology will no longer be a discipline of study, as in the modernist/Enlightenment paradigm, but a frame work for global thinking and action. Postmodern Christians will also find themselves living within the postmodern world. Postmodern theologian Leonard Sweet offers these ten postmodern sensibilities to replace the protocol of modernism that we often take for granted.

"Do many things at once" is Sweet's rebuttal to the modern notion of only being able to do one thing at a time. People are so used to being able to complete many tasks within the same time span that it is nearly impossible to put a work load into a linear pattern. The multiple problems in society can no longer be handled one at a time. They are so interrelated they must be
tackled all at once. This sensibility will allow us to recognize the connections of polar extremes without choosing one or the other—we can handle both at once (Sweet, 268-270).

"There are many best ways to do God's will" is the postmodern revision of the concept of there being a right way and wrong way to doing things. The "right way/wrong way" concept follows the either/or pattern of modernistic thinking and forces them people to value rank the variety of responses to the world instead of recognizing the value of each. The "many-roomed" house of God pictured in the Bible shows that Christianity thrives on the diversity of approaches instead of the homogenous vision of modern thinkers. Reconciliation of differences will take importance over proselytizing others to one viewpoint (Sweet, 271-275).

"Be everything" is the postmodern answer to the idea that a person cannot do everything. This shows the resistance against specialization the postmodern philosophy has. Instead of specializing and dividing knowledge, the postmoderns are seeing the connections between different disciplines and learning much about many things. This creates complete thinkers who can formulate ideas and attitudes based on a wide variety of viewpoints instead of a cramped and limited field of knowledge. This also allows the postmodern Christian to "have life, and have it more abundantly (John 10:10)" (Sweet, 276-277).

"Accept constraints, live within limits" is the alternative to the idea that you can do anything you put your mind to do.
This may appear to be in contradiction with the previous point of being everything but in fact it is only another postmodern paradox. The idea of being everything does not mean that there are not limits to what can be done. Many people grew up with the idea that they could have anything they wanted to have as long as they worked hard enough. This has been wrong since the beginning when Adam and Eve found out that life has its limits. The wastefulness of the modern era has left the "baby buster" generation in their twenties knowing that they will be the first generation since the industrial revolution not to be better off than their parents. Hopefully, the postmodern realization of limits will allow the people to feel they have enough an work toward ending the threat of and eco-apocalypse (Sweet, 278-280).

"If at first you don't succeed, try something else" is the sensible substitution for the traditional "try, try again." The ability to try another approach is a vital talent in the postmodern world. The mentality of trying the same failed plan over and over encourages the frustrating wastes of resources and time. The flexibility of trying different approaches coupled with the trying of many approaches at once will allow postmoderns to attack the problems of society with a greater effectiveness. This ability to try different approaches cannot happen without the previously mentioned effort to be everything-- the more knowledge, the more approaches (Sweet, 281-282).

"You can be many places at the same time" is the replacement for the idea that you can't be more than one place at a time.
The mentality of being at only one place at one time is what has made modern institutions stand still in time and fade into obsolescence. Postmodern institutions will spread themselves out and be present in many lands and many cultures at the same time while still maintaining its identity. With the onset of telecommunications and high speed travel, many people find distance to be more of a mindset than a physical separation. This mentality will allow the postmodern Church to truly make an impact in the global village (Sweet, 283-284).

"Make the net work" is the new framing of the old idea of learning to do it yourself. The individualism fostered by the modernist mindset fragmented society and set up barriers between people. These barriers have given root to the major misunderstandings of our century. We must learn to learn from each other and depend upon one another for support and understanding. This is the societal equivalent of the interconnectedness of ecology. Just as what we do as people affects the environment around us, so does it affect the people around us. After all "no man is an island" (Sweet, 284-285).

"There are complex, hard responses to life's challenges" is the revisioning of the idea that there are simple answers to every problem. The postmodern sensibility does not seek to centralize and simplify the problems of society in an attempt to solve them. Too many modernistic approaches have led to solutions based on sweeping generalizations that eventually leave out vital factors that must be addressed. Postmoderns will seek
to embrace the diversity of ideas and the myriad of factors and seek out the paradoxes on which understanding can be built. The acceptance of complexity will allow us to handle the many headed hydars in society (Sweet, 286-289).

"Keep learning what you already know" is the substitution for the idea that you don't know everything. This protocol is not a mandate to specialize your education but rather a call to reject the idea that you have to know everything in order to act. The efforts of modern science to form an absolute truth has lead to the relentless search for more knowledge when it leads us to nowhere. Postmoderns will act when they see the need to act and have enough knowledge to act. Instead of trying to learn it all, the postmodern Christian will learn what they need to become effective. They will also learn what they already know even better, therefore adding a clearer and more distinct voice into the mix of solutions that approach problems (Sweet, 290-292).

"The truth lies in the extremes being held together is the substitution for the idea of the truth being in the middle. The modern mindset had no way to reconcile the differences between two polar extremes other than to take a position in the middle where no position was taken at all. By holding the extremes in tension with each other and understanding both together, the postmodern mindset will create new positions that offer the chance for reconciliation. Many postmoderns are approaching the abortion issue with an interesting stance. They believe that abortion a wrong choice to make but that the choice cannot be
legislated--it must be a choice. Immediately they are not accepted by either extreme, yet they are not in the middle either. The solutions coming from this stance are focused on the conditions that create unwanted pregnancies instead of the clinics and the doctors. By holding the two extremes together, postmoderns are able to address the source of the problem instead of the end of it (Sweet, 293-295).

These ten postmodern protocols point out the drastic difference from the modernistic approaches we have used for years. Yet, many of them seem familiar because we have been using them every day. This only illustrates that the postmodern era is underway and the transition has begun.
Works Cited


